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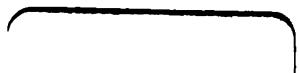
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In the
POTTER'S HOUSE
George Dyre Eldridge



N.F.

El Jardín



IN THE POTTER'S HOUSE

In the Potter's House

By
George Dyre Eldridge



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Doubleday, Page & Company
1908
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APR 1908

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LXXXII

"As under cover of departing Day
Slunk hunger-stricken Ramazán away,
Once more within the Potter's house alone
I stood, surrounded by the Shapes of clay.

LXXXVI

"After a momentary silence spake
Some Vessel of a more ungainly make;
They sneer at me for leaning all awry:
'What! did the Hand then of the Potter shake?'"

RUBAIYAT.

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 [REDACTED]

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IN THE POTTER'S HOUSE



CHAPTER I

THE ORDINATION DINNER

SARTAIN sure, they be scripchural, fur they eat what is set before 'em."

Tom Blanket gave a glance down the long tables as he lifted a quarter of a pumpkin pie on to his plate and attacked it vigorously with his knife. It was the ordination dinner, spread in the prayer-meeting room of Padanaram meeting-house. The tables were loaded with roast spareribs, chicken pies, pork tenderloins, baked beans, mince and pumpkin pies and great platters of brown, crisp doughnuts that dropped off the fatness of the land. The coffee was black and bitter; and the tea was blacker and bitterer.

"Thar's one thet's off his feed." Deacon Buffington nodded, as he spoke, toward the table on the platform at the end of the room, at which sat the visiting clergymen, and with them Simeon Craig, the new pastor of the church in Padanaram, that day ordained to the preaching of the Gospel. Craig had eaten nothing save a bowl of johnny-cake and milk.

"It's kinder like flyin' in the face o' Providence to balk at sech a meal as this," Blanket declared.

"You hain't temptin' Providence one mite, be you?" grunted Peleg Singleton, who kept store and was postmaster.

"I try to live up to the r'sponsibilities o' Christian opportunities," Tom answered. "But it kinder seems

IN THE POTTER'S HOUSE

ef 't was eatin' we wanted done we need n't a' gone outside Padynaram."

"Wall, when I 've got work to du, I want a hoss or a critter that kin eat," the deacon reasserted. "The Ol' Feller's tu smart to be much scart of a minister that eats johnny-cake."

"I ruther take tu the way Elder Babbitt puts away vittles," Singleton affirmed. He had a practical mind for grocery bills.

Elder Babbitt, a visiting clergyman, was still at work at a plate heaped high with the solid food of the feast.

"Wall," Blanket admitted, "it did seem 's ef he would n't leave no dust in thet thar pulpit cushion."

The women talked in low whispers and without continuity, dominated by the presence of their husbands and the visiting clergymen. Ignorant of the deference that convention yields to woman, they felt the deterrence of the masculine mass, where the individual would have proved incentive. The weight of inherited traditions, which kept them silent in the meeting, oppressed them in the presence of much that stood to them as the outward symbol of the church itself.

The young girls of the congregation, ranging from fifteen to twenty, with a spinster or two who had forgotten to count the years, were acting as waitresses, and were to eat at a second table, in company with the larger boys and unmarried men, who were waiting about the horse-sheds, impatient under hunger and the long postponement of all that was attractive to them in the ordination service. Now and then one, more bold than the others, came and pressed his face against the low windows, taking account of the progress of the meal, and catching a glimpse of the hurrying figures in bright

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THE ORDINATION DINNER

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calicoes or fresh muslin, which were the festive garb of Padanaram maidenhood in the early fifties.

"You'd better keep a eye on Rebecca Marsh, Tom Wilson," cried a half-grown lad who had taken his place at the window. "She's mighty keerful o' the new pahson!"

The man addressed, tall, ungainly, but not unhandsome in his honesty of expression, flushed to the roots of his yellow hair.

"Darn a unmarried min'ster any way," he muttered, as he came out from under the shed, pocketing the jack-knife with which he had been whittling a partition. "We might 's well be Cath'lics an' done 'th it!"

When he reached the window, Rebecca Marsh was offering the new minister a savoury-looking quarter of mince pie, which he was declining with persistent gravity. The sense of temerity in thus venturing to the very head table, had brought a flush to her cheek that made her more than usually attractive. Wilson saw it, at a glance, and grumbled under his breath.

"Sorter get thee behin' me, Satan, about him, hain't that?" demanded the lad, who, like his elders, drew his similes from but one source.

"Be yer hin'-eend achin' to be kicked?" snorted Wilson, only to be greeted by a shout of derision from his companions.

"I tell ye what, Tom," one of them suggested, as he sauntered gloomily back to the horse-shed, "ef I 's you, I 'd give the new pahson his fust job o' marryin', ef she 'd hev me."

"She won't!" the boy at the window shouted. "He 's took a doughnut from her."

"But he hain't eatin' it," a second boy, drawn by curiosity to the window, declared. "He 's jest laid it on his plate."

"The ol' feller 't preached this mornin's goin' to ax a blessin'. Better come an' hear it, Tom," the first boy called.

"Darn him!" Wilson growled, made reckless by his jealousy. "He slops words like a mill-pon' in a spring freshet!"

"Gosh! He 's through," the boy exclaimed, "He 's too high fed to hev any wind."

The clergymen came out and were conducted to one of the neighbouring houses to rest until supper and evening preaching. The older men filed out to the horse-sheds to discuss the sermon and the crops, while the young men and boys hurried in to their own feeding.

One of them, as he passed Tom Blanket, hailed him.

"Be thar enything left, Tom?"

"Bout twelve baskets o' fragments, I sh'd say," Tom answered.

"Wall, it 's a mericle, a'ter the way they did stuff 'emsel's."

"Look here, Bub," Tom began, catching him by the jacket to get time to expound his philosophy, "you 'll allus fin' a clar conscience and a good appetite keepin' comp'ny like a hahnsum gal an' her bes' feller, an' thar did n't 'pear to be but one oneasy conscience in thar to-day."

CHAPTER II

SIMEON CRAIG

FROM the forty houses which made up the village of Padanaram, one only gleam of light shone into the dark: one earthly star among the points of light that dotted the blue blackness of the heavens. The lanes and ways that wound among the scattered houses were unlighted. When social or religious duties called a Padanaramite into the night, he bore his own lantern. At nine o'clock these lights had been as frequent as fireflies over a June lowland. Now the village slept under the stars. A cock sounded his midnight challenge, and a distant housedog gave a single bark.

Padanaram had seen no other such day as that now closed, on which the Reverend Simeon Craig had been installed pastor of the village church, as well as ordained to the ministry. The ordination sermon had been preached by a Doctor of Divinity from Millbank, and another from Augusta had shared in the laying on of hands. Now, not a bed was vacant in the village, though most of the lads were sleeping on the hay in the mows. It was a day to live in village memory.

To the Reverend Simeon Craig, who stood at the low window looking into the blackness, this single candle, companioned only by heavenly lights, was at once a symbol and an inspiration. The exaltation of spirit to which the events of the day had been confirmation, was yet undimmed. For him, firmly set in the holiness of his mission, the possibility that it could ever grow

dim, did not exist. While his flock slept, he, the shepherd, watched, and God watched with him.

The room was a loft above the kitchen projection of what had once been a farmhouse. It was under the peak only and for a foot or two on either side that the clergyman could stand upright. One full window at the end, two half-windows under the eaves, and a door to the stairway, broke the yellow dinginess of the plastered walls. For furniture, there was a pine bedstead, stained in imitation of mahogany; a pine wash-stand, painted yellow; an unpainted pine table; two wooden chairs, one of the ordinary kitchen variety, and one a rocker with rush seat, and some rough shelves, loosely nailed together, for holding books. The unpainted floor was bare, save for a rug of braided rags in front of the bedstead. On the wash-stand was a tin basin and pitcher, and a brown earthen dish in which lay a piece of coarse yellow soap. A towel of rough crash hung from a roller on the wall. A dozen volumes were on the shelves, and a Bible, bound in worn sheepskin, lay on the table in the light of the tallow dip that burned with a yellow flame in its candlestick. The saving grace of the place was cleanliness,

The clergyman himself, a man under twenty-five years of age, was tall, broad shouldered and raw-boned — the frame of a man who in time should weigh two hundred and twenty-five pounds and now weighed a hundred and seventy. His face was smooth-shaved and ruddy with the flush of superb health; a fine face that was almost spoiled by a heavy under-jaw and a thin crop of lank black hair, that showed no tendency, even at the ends, to depart from the rigidity of the straightest lines. The feet and hands were large, and the size of the former was exaggerated by the coarseness

of the cowhide boots. He was dressed in clerical black, ill-fitted, but cleanly brushed, and wore a white linen neckcloth, wound several times about his throat and tied in a plain knot. As were his boots, so was every article of apparel of the coarsest material.

The man and the room left little to be explained. The room revealed the man. The humblest and poorest of the dozen offered to his use, its selection attested the non-importance to himself of his personality in comparison with the work given him to do.

Not yet had ceased the wonder and awe of his call to the work of the Lord in the ministry of His Church. That he had heard an actual call, he doubted no more than did Saul of Tarsus.

Bred on a farm among the hills, from the time he was thought strong enough to help in the work, his school-days were that part only of the winter months when the snow left possible the three-mile morning and evening tramp, and he could find no sufficient excuse for permission to linger in the attractions of fireside and barn. At the age of eighteen, he made his Declaration of Independence in the matter of schools, and won, because his father saw in his great frame the impossibility of physical enforcement of his command. The scene between them had been one of stormy upbraiding on the one side and sullen silence on the other, and the boy held to his bluntly asserted purpose.

The father had feared in this act the beginning of general rebellion, and this fear lay at the root of his anger. The boy, however, had no dislike for work; but rather that New England sense of thrift that scarce comprehends life without the labour necessary to sustain it. Moreover, his great physical strength and abundant health made idleness almost intolerable.

On this score, the father had no cause for complaint, and soon secretly rejoiced in rebellion that secured him some relief from tasks that had become heavy to his early aging.

In his twentieth year, there came to the scattered community in which he lived a period of intense religious excitement. Exhorters and evangelists came from far and near; the distant schoolhouse was filled nightly with crowds, whose dormant sense of sin was newly restirred, and the story was blown far and wide of the wondrous things that God was doing among these hills and valleys, and of the sinners who were finding peace in reconciliation with God.

Almost alone Simeon Craig seemed unaffected and indifferent. He attended one or two meetings, more in curiosity than otherwise, and then was seldom seen in the nightly gathering. Even when the excitement became so strong that New England devotion to work could not still the call of the greater issue of salvation, and there was afternoon preaching, he remained at his farmwork, declaring that when the weeds took holiday, or the Lord saved the corn without the plough and the hoe, he too would be idle. His indifference, and the condition of sin of which it spoke, became a favourite theme with the preachers, until finally his neighbours looked upon him as one foredoomed from the beginning of the world to that greater death, which is Sin.

One afternoon, when his plough was the only one for miles around that was not idle, he was pausing at the end of the line of young corn, with a secret joy in his heart at the workmanlike straightness of the long furrow he had just turned, when suddenly he heard the call, "Simeon; Simeon Craig!"

He raised his head and looked down the long field.

Only the birds were about him, and the soft breeze lifting the corn blades. Behind, the white birches, where the pines had been cleared a few years before, were tremulous in the glad sunshine. He dipped his share into the warm earth and started his horses. At the end of the new furrow, as he turned again, he heard the call, "Simeon; Simeon Craig!"

In every son of New England ancestry lingers still some inheritance of faith, that was warm in the old days when the elders walked with God and spoke by his authority to the people. In Simeon Craig it had lain unsuspected, but now, stirring to its awakening, needed only this voice out of the silence. With his hands resting on the plough shafts, he dropped his head, and not he, but something deeper than self, answered:

"Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth."

From the wonderful stillness of the summer sunshine came the answer:

"Go preach the Gospel to dying men, and preach unto the people the preaching that I bid thee."

To this command his dormant self awakened and answered:

"I know not how to preach."

The spirit of his exaltation asserted itself again over his natural self, and he heard the voice answering his doubt:

"Take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak."

The horses had stopped in the furrow, and as one moving through some power other than his own, Craig unhitched them from the plough, turned one into the pasture and, mounting the other, without even throwing a coat over his shoulders, putting shoes on his feet or

washing the soil from his hands, he rode across country to the schoolhouse where was the afternoon preaching. He did not ask himself what he was to do there. He had accepted literally the words of the answer to his last expressed doubt, "it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak." He was simply obeying.

He arrived as the last hymn ended, immediately before the benediction. He strode up the narrow aisle between the crowded benches, his bare feet scarcely sounding as they touched the floor. His tall figure, uncouth garb and tumbled hair caught every eye, but there was something in his rapt face that carried a meaning to the clergyman who was about to pronounce the benediction, and he paused, feeling that a message-bearer from the Master was with them.

Craig came to the raised platform where the elders sat, and there he turned and faced the congregation. He had no sense of any words that he was to speak; he simply obeyed, relying on God to keep the promise he had made him. On the intense silence broke the words:

"The Lord hath appointed me to preach the Gospel to mankind. God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty. The base things of the world, and things which are despised hath God chosen. What am I that I should question the voice of our God?"

It was a people to whom he spoke, born of generations of fathers who believed in the personal presence of God, and that He intervenes in the affairs of men. With them, men were yet called to salvation and to the preaching of God's word, and only through such call were they to be sanctified. There was nothing to them more

surprising or unusual in His calling this untutored farmer's lad to do his work, than that he had called the sons of Zebedee, the fisherman. It was the awe of a great and indisputable fact that fell upon them, as of the rushing mighty wind on the day of Pentecost.

From that day to this Simeon Craig had never doubted the reality of his call. As a licensed exhorter, he had begun on that very day the work the Lord had given him to do, and at the same time had taken up the task of preparing himself for preaching. He did not ask himself if he were fit. That was God's business, not his. His only part was obedience. Failure, ridicule, opprobrium — he feared nothing, save disobedience. And to-day he had been ordained, with the laying on of hands, as was Matthias of old, and there had been given to his charge the church at Padanaram. He had been faithful to God; he had no question that God would keep his covenant with him, and at all times put in his mouth the words he was to speak.

There was no doubt, no question, with him as he sat watching and praying in this upper chamber, only the awe inspired by a great and terrible fact.

CHAPTER III

THE FIRST BREAKFAST

PADANARAM awoke on the morrow of the great day to a sense of departing glory, and the weariness which follows dissipation, however holy its purpose. In a community where every hour from dawn to dark brought its task, the loss of a whole day in the middle of the week left heavy arrears to be made good, and these were increased by the idle hours given to departing guests, who were many of them slow with dragging sleep which kept them in bed until the earlier sun was fairly over the hills. The doctors of divinity were the tardiest, and it was after seven o'clock before they were on their way to the ten miles distant railway, grumbling with non-clerical worldliness of the urgency which doomed them to hours of uncomfortable waiting at the country station for the train which passed at noon-day. While Padanaram had carried itself with credit through the day of the ordination, its thriftiness revolted against paying the price of a second day.

At sunrise, Simeon Craig was striding across the fields from a morning plunge in the river. Four hours of sleep and the tonic of the cold bath had set every vein in his body a-tingle with the tide of abundant health, till he felt that he could carry the burden of a kingdom, where he was only called on to bear that of the tiniest of parishes. Deacon Buffington, who was driving his slow ox-team through the great farm gates, hailed him with cheerful deference.

"Good mornin', pahson. You been't a sluggard who turns on his pillar, I see."

"I was a farmer's lad too many years to be able to sleep after sunup," the young clergyman answered, shaking hands with his deacon and turning to walk beside him, with clear understanding that he would begrudge even five minutes' delay in getting to his work.

"Wall, you must larn now to take it easy. The crops hain't a drivin' you as they used to do."

"The Master's harvest is ripe for the reaping," Craig answered solemnly. "It 's no time for His servants to take their ease."

"I know, pahson; but it 's mostly Sundays and the Thursday night prar-meetin's where you 've got the harvestin' to do, an' thar 's lots o' spare time between."

"I hope to find it filled with the Master's work. I 'd be sorry to feel that I was fit only for a few hours' work, where all others work so steadily."

"But that 's dif'runt. Ye can't do nothin' on a farm 'ithout bein' at it arly an' late. Jest loaf a bit, an' the weeds do grow as ef the' ol' Nick was in 'em."

"And so in the garden of the Lord, the Devil don't take any rest, and until he does, the Master's labourers will find no time to loaf."

"Wall, pahson, 'tain't fur me to say, but I du hope you 'll give us some good old-fashioned preachin'. Ol' Pahson Fletcher was a good man, but he got sorter easy to'ard the eend an' thar was more o' the beauties of heaven in his sarmonts than thar was o' the pains of hell. It don't du even a old church member like me no harm to be taken by the nap o' the neck once in a while an' held over the pit to see what 's thar."

The clergyman's face glowed with the deep enthusiasm

that was always quickened when the duties of his high calling were under discussion. Then his voice was the voice of the God he served rather than his own, and he spoke as one having authority.

"I am come not to bring peace, but a sword," he answered. "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch and is withered; and men gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned."

The older farmer watched the young clergyman striding homeward, and felt a new doubt which had had birth before. The words were orthodox, to suit the most exacting, but had the man force to live up to them? He had not eaten well, and he repeated to himself that a man or a horse was little to be depended on when off his feed. He could well wish that the man had begun differently.

Mrs. Marlow was standing by the kitchen stove, when Craig came in, watching the clock, the coffee pot and the oven. After thirty years of widowhood, the responsibility of cooking for a man, and that man the parson, came as a burden to be dreaded. Her soul was oppressed by the fear that the soda biscuit would be heavy or the coffee weak. She was a tall, gaunt woman, with smoothly brushed iron-gray hair, a face that long years of sorrow and longer years of toil had marked with many lines, and a heart that hungered for love, only to be cheated in wifehood and robbed of motherhood.

"Ah," she gave a sigh of relief on seeing the clergyman. "You be to the minute. Mostly men folks think the fire an' the bakin' 'll wait fur 'em."

The plate of smoking hot rolls that was drawn from the oven brought a cloud to the clergyman's face.

"Mrs. Marlow," he said, sternly and coldly, "you are breaking our agreement the very first morning."

"These?" she asked, looking at the offending dish.
"It's only so'thin' I fixed, it bein' the fust breakfast."

"First or second has nothing to do with it," he said firmly. "Breakfast was to be an egg, or piece of bacon or ham, johnny-cake or brown bread, cold, and a glass of milk. It was to be that, and that it is to be."

"But ef I be a mind to add a bit of coffee or a hot biscuit once in a while?"

"You're to add nothing," he said. "I want the breakfast I agreed for: that or nothing."

It came to her suddenly that the clergyman was actually in earnest, and the dream that had beguiled her morning task was gone. She looked at the rolls and then at him.

"An' you won't eat 'em?" she asked.

"No; I will not," he said.

She set the pan on the dresser, tears of disappointment rolling down her withered cheeks. To eat one of the rolls after that would have choked her. She was old enough to be his mother, and it had seemed to her, in the days since he hired her loft and arranged with her for his meals, as if she touched life at a new point, which gave her more to care for than had been hers for many a long year. She had planned in a hundred ways to do and care for him, not simply because he was her boarder or her clergyman, but because here was offered something that filled a need of her very being. And this was the end of it all. He repulsed her first act of thoughtfulness, and insisted upon the cold letter of their agreement. She brought the johnny-cake and milk and poured herself a cup of coffee, more from habit than because she had further desire therefor.

If the clergyman noted or measured her grief, his attitude was that of either indifference or brutality.

From the table beside his plate, he took the Bible and read a chapter, and, standing, prayed extemporaneously. Then, only, did he seat himself to the meagre breakfast on which he had insisted. The widow nibbled at some bread and sipped her coffee, too sad with this little thing that to her was so great to talk or eat. Before he had finished, Craig said:

"Now let us understand each other, Mrs. Marlow. I eat to live and to have strength to work. Anything more than that is gluttony and an abomination. I did not expect to have to go over this matter a second time, and I will not a third. This must be final."

"Yessir," she said, between a sob and a silence. Her castles were dashed to the ground, the future mattered nothing.

He turned to go to his loft, and for an instant it seemed as if something of the tragedy in which he had part struck him, for he turned, as if to speak a word of comfort; then he felt the absurdity of making a mountain of trouble out of the mole-hill of a plate of biscuit grown cold, and left unsaid the word that might have proved him human.

CHAPTER IV

TOM BLANKET

TO THE uninvited, Padanaram was prohibitive. There was no public house where a meal or a night's lodging could be had. The two or three shopkeepers dealt by mail with their regular jobbers, to the exclusion of travelling salesmen, and acted as factors for the purchase of the country crops. These shops were the centre of village gossip, since there was no saloon or tavern. Indeed, a man seen entering such a place would have received the brand of social ostracism.

The clergyman was usually a married man and a renter. The winter schoolmaster boarded around; but the spring and fall schools were, as a rule, under charge of some home-bred girl, to whom the twelve dollars of monthly salary, actually paid in money, seemed a fortune.

The daily stage arrived in the evening, and in the morning afforded any unfortunate stranger means of escape to a land of possible lodging and food. Excepting for the mail contract, a stage would have been a financial impossibility.

It was because of these conditions that Tom Blanket, the stage driver, hesitated to accept a passenger who offered himself at the railway station one afternoon. He knew that if any one was expected at Padanaram, he would have heard days in advance. The stranger was, therefore, coming unheralded. Such a thing had not happened before in his twelve years of staging. On

the one side was the three shilling fare; on the other the chance of exposing a fellow being to sleeping supperless in a chance barn. Finally he made a compromise with conscience and demanded:

"Be you expected?"

The stranger, a well-shaped fellow of medium height, whose laughing blue eyes were a warning to a cautious man to add a half dozen years to the estimate of twenty-one to be drawn from his entire face, answered:

"If I was, you would n't have to ask. I 'll sit side of you." He threw his carpet-bag into the body of the stage, and climbed to the designated seat, thus releasing Tom of further sense of responsibility.

The twelve miles to Padanaram, covered by easy stages, with frequent stops for business or gossip at the scattered farmhouses, gave opportunity for exercise of the serious art of interrogation. With the skill of a master, Tom ignored the stranger until the first stop, during which he left him in the stage with the other packages. Out of the corner of his eye, he watched secretly until he saw a shade of weariness overspread the other's face, when he abruptly drawled out the information:

"Jest north o' the meetin'-house, to the right, thar 's a empty barn, half full o' good clean hay."

"The fact 's interesting, if not useful," said the passenger, showing a disposition to talk.

"You 'll find it useful when ye get sleepy," retorted the driver.

"Do you mean I can't get a place to sleep?" asked the other.

"Oh, ye kin sleep thar all right. I 'll call round fur you in the mornin' at seven."

"You 've got a meeting-house then?" the passenger

asked, showing less disposition to make weight of the lodging matter than Tom had hoped. "Is it orthodox?"

"Sartain; it's ours, hain't it?"

"The preacher's all right?"

"Say," the driver exploded. "I s'pose thar hain't a smarter one this side o' 'Gusta, ef thar be thar."

The stranger seemed to take unusual interest in the answer, as if he detected in it something that the other had not said. He made this apparent in his next question:

"Don't he give you enough hell-fire?"

"We tried him afore we hired him," Tom answered. If the church had been cheated in the bargain, it was not for him to say so.

"Well; what is the matter?" Tom looked with frank wonder at the man who was pressing him to the wall. Still, he found it impossible to dodge an answer:

"I'm a perfessin' Christian myself, an' so's most of us; an' as sech, I know the foundation o' faith. Sometimes, though, I don't like tohev hell crammed down my throat. It's a kind of insiniwation I don't live up to my privileges fur the pahson to think he's got to spring hell ev'ry Sabbath day!"

"How'd you get your money's worth, if he did n't?" demanded the other.

"I'd rayther hear 'bout the golden streets an' thet sorter thing. Ef my curosity gets the better o' me, I kin make sartain o' hell, without his help; but t'other place is diff'runt."

The other laughed with a boyish laugh that was good to hear. At least, Tom Blanket thought so, glancing at him with a broad smile playing over his rough, weather-beaten face.

"Say, I bet you kin sleep out all right. Thet's the

way I uster hear folks laff. They don't do it now — I guess 'tain't orthodox."

"Don't this hell-preaching parson of yours laugh?"

Tom was silent, as if considering, and then, with sudden conviction in his conclusion, exclaimed:

"I swan, he don't! I hed n't thought on it afore; but he don't!"

"He and God must be awfully out of sorts with each other."

It was a new point of view, and as such worth the attention of a Yankee who suspected more than he knew. When he was ready with his judgment he spoke:

"It does seem a terrible waste on the part o' the Lord tu hev made some men, ef he meant 'em to laff. Sometimes He must be darned mad with Himself."

"Well," said the youngster, to his surprise taking a serious view of the matter, "you know he botched the very first batch of dough."

"In Adam's fall, we sinnēd all." Tom came back to primaries, in an effort to counter a form of expression he was not quite certain he was safe in enjoying.

"When you spread that original sin over the whole world, is n't it mighty considerable thin in spots?" demanded the youngster.

"Do you know what happens when a fish-worm's cut in tu?" asked Tom.

"No."

"Thar 's two fish-worms; both on 'em orignals."

About a mile before reaching the Padanaram post-office, they caught sight, on the treeless hill top, of a tall figure in black, sharp against the misty blue of the afternoon sky.

"By gum! Thar 's the pahson now," exclaimed Tom.

The other gave a quick glance and sprang to the ground, without stopping the slow stage.

"Leave my carpet-bag at the parson's boarding-place," he called, as he leaped the stone wall and started at a brisk pace to intercept the clergyman.

Tom drew his horse to a stand, and sat with his elbow on his knee and his chin in his hand. Two emotions were contending for mastery; the one, chagrin that he had learned nothing of the youngster; the other, admiration for a skill that could elude his questions. Withal, there was the resentment of the professional toward the successful amateur in his mood.

After a moment an expression of satisfaction stole over his face, and he started his horse to brisker movement than before. Thus he came to the side door of Widow Marlow's house, and to conference with Widow Marlow herself.

"The pahson's got comp'ny," he announced, producing the carpet-bag from the depths of the stage. His mature judgment was that this was the method to produce the deepest sensation.

The event proved him correct. The widow threw up her hands, and stood speechless on the doorstep. Tom enjoyed his triumph a full moment, and then said:

"Oh, I hain't got 'em nowhere about my pusson. They're a comin'," and he jerked his head in the direction of the highway, to give point to his statement.

"Be thar many?" the widow gasped.

"Not a rej'ment," said Tom. "Thar's one."

The widow breathed again. She drew nearer and looked at the carpet-bag, but without offering to take it.

"Be he goin' to stay long?" she asked.

"He did n't say whether he'd stay two or three weeks," said Tom, speaking unimpeachable truth.

"Does he look pertikeler like?"

"I sh'd say he 'd ben coddled in the lap o' luxury," answered Tom; "an' never allowed to fall off. He wears store clothes, an' a starched collar that 's a danger to his eyes. The pints air the sharpest thing about him." There was a sweetness of revenge in this last declaration.

"An' I 'll hev to keep him three weeks!" Mrs. Marlow exclaimed. "Them that envies widders don't know their trials and tribulations!"

"In some countries they burn 'em with the dead corpses o' their husbands," said Tom sententiously.

"Ugh!" the widow shuddered.

"Tain't 'xactly Christian," Tom admitted. "Besides, I b'lieve that's where that's more 'n one, so 's to stop the quarrellin' over the estate o' the late deceased."

"They could a' saved the fire wood, ef't ben Bill Marlow's widders. The town 'd hed to give it, fur he did n't leave enough to pay fur it, let alone the kindlin' to set the fire," said the other. "Be he young or old?"

"Young in years," replied Tom; "but unsettled in his meetin'-house idees. He 's got some loose notions 'bout hell, an' kinder speaks slightlying of original sin."

"He hain't one o' 'em as they calls a invalid, be he?" demanded the widow, horrified at Tom's statement.

"I would n't say as he 's actily a consarned infilid — the word 's infilid, Miss Marlow; invalid is sick o' the body; infilid o' the soul. He hain't jest what you 'd call a infilid; but I 'd say he was a Universaler or a 'Piscopal. That 's the way I measured him up, an' he rode over from the deepot with me."

"Wall: ef you did n't get at the rights o' him in that time," the widow assured him; "I don't reckon that's anybody 'bout here that's likely to, Mr. Blanket.

Everybody ses as you air notorious fur gettin' at the in'ards o' things."

"I hev my gifts, Miss Marlow; I hev my gifts," assented Tom complacently, yet with a lingering sense of shame that he had so ill verified his countryside reputation. "What I hain't found out, it'll take a crowbar an' a peckax to get at. You may put him down as a Universaler, an' you won't go fur wrong, I kin tell ye!"

Tom stopped as he was driving out of the yard.

"Consarnin' bein' a widder, Miss Marlow; sometime I've felt that bein' a widderer hain't all it's cracked up to be; an ef — "

The widow interrupted:

"Ef thar's anything less 'n your etarnal salvation, Tom Blanket, this hain't no time to pester me with it, with only two loaves o' rye bread in the house, an' him prob'ly eatin' wheat flour all his life, an' thet spare room to make up, which it hain't ben slept in, the Lord knows when!"

Tom drove on to the post office, where a crowd of a dozen watched solemnly as there was disgorged from the cavernous depths of the great mail bag a single letter and the clergyman's weekly copy of the *Gospel Messenger*.

"You be gettin' more 'n more keerless ev'ry day o' your life, Tom Blanket," declared Peleg Singleton, in his capacity of postmaster. "You be ten minutes late with this 'ere mail, agin; an' how you dare fly in the face o' the Gov'ment at Wash'n'ton that away, gets me. I'm expectin' on 'em to take it up ev'ry week, thet I am."

"An' you've ben expectin' it, to my sartain knowledge, fur the last ten year; an' I hain't seen nor hear'n of your ol' Gov'ment, 'cept when they send their check

once a quarter, which hain't what it orter be, consid'rin' I got to stan' your blamed ol' lectur ev'ry time I hev to bring a passenger over from the deepot an' take him to whar he 's a goin' afore I bring the mail."

"A passenger!" came from the crowd, whose attention the unexpected news diverted wholly from the well worn quarrels of Tom and the postmaster. "Who 's got comp'ny?"

"Wall," responded Tom, with too evident reluctance; "'twar n't intended to be told, but ole Peleg drew it out o' me, afore I knew, with his blamed fault-findin'. The pahson 's got comp'ny from down Portland way. I brung him over from the deepot."

"'Twar n't meant to be known," sneered the postmaster. "What in thunder 'd anybody s'pose 'd happen ef you knew? Up to Nordg'walk they draw deeds, 'Know Tom Blanket by these presents.' Ef he knows, all creation does tu."

Tom winked to the crowd.

"Peleg 's strong this a'fternoon," he said. "As the pahson ses, this would-be ironicasm is techin'."

"But the Pahson's comp'ny," someone interposed "be he young or old? Another pahson? Be he goin' to preach Sabbath day? What 's like be he?" came from one and another.

"Laws-a-massy!" and Tom stretched his long legs out and twisted his face into a grimace of alarm; "the bung 's clean busted out an' the cider 's sizzlin' over ev'rything. Ef you 'll gin me time, I 'll make a list an' go back and get answers."

"Ef you druv him over from the deepot," said Peleg, throwing off at last his assumed indifference; "he 's pumped dry, an' you don't need nobody to help you 'th questions."

A shade of sadness stole over Tom's face at words that recalled his defeat of the afternoon. He gathered up the lines and made ready to drive to the stable.

"What I heered," he said with dignity; "I heered in confidence, an' it's safe in my buzzum. All is I'd advise you all to be to meetin' Sabbath mornin', ef you want to hear a bang-up sarmont thet smells o' melted brimstun."

CHAPTER V

MRS. MARLOW'S NEW BOARDER

THE stranger overtook the clergyman as the latter was turning toward the bars that let into the highway. He had been humorously conscious for some time that Craig was so deeply buried in thought that he had no perception of the presence of any one; and he was waiting his expression of surprise, when he could no longer ignore him. The clergyman glanced up and met his presence with,

"Good afternoon, brother — ah — why! Barnaby! Where did you drop from?" His hand went out, and the grasp was of most unclerical warmth.

"From the station stage, just now," laughed the other. "I've been tracking you for the last quarter of a mile. You carry the burdens of this — world," and he swept his hand to include the scattered houses, "heavily."

Craig gazed around at the expanse of meadow and trees, with house and barn peeping out here and there and the broad river in the distance. The lengthening shadows were as yet sharp cut in the July sunlight, and every trifle stood forth with exaggerated importance that lent reality to the silence of time sleeping through the summer hour. Yet there was a beauty in it all that the stranger seemed to breathe into his very soul, and the clergyman to recognise as something alien to his mood.

"What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" retorted Craig. "Or a soul

entrusted to his charge?" he added before his pause became a break.

"Do you hold yourself responsible for all the souls under your charge?" asked Barnaby, in surprise.

"Is there any other meaning possible to my pastorate?" Craig asked simply.

Barnaby seemed to find the question a strange one, for he studied it with some care before reaching a satisfactory answer. Then he said:

"It was n't possible for you to miss being a clergyman."

"No: since I am one," said Craig. "Nor you."

"Oh!" exclaimed Barnaby, suddenly, as speaking of something he had forgotten. "That's all over. My dad and I've made up, and it's forget and forgive. I've let the pulpit slip, and taken to the bar as a means of making the public support me."

Craig winced, visibly and physically. The glow of welcome that had lighted his face faded, and his mood grew cold and awkward. He was a man who felt opposition as personal hostility, and to whom the purpose of life was the atmosphere of life itself.

"You have done right," he said. "A man who could do that would be guilty not to do it. The Master has never softened His command to the young man, 'Sell all that thou hast and give to the poor and come and follow me.' Unless one can obey, let him spare the Church — and himself."

"Oh, pshaw!" said Barnaby, carelessly, but not ill-naturedly; "you can't take these things literally. You'd get yourself tied up in a hard knot in twenty-four hours. One's got to be practical."

For an instant the clergyman seemed to feel the dividing impulse of courtesy and duty, but he had so

sternly shut his heart to the world that the issue was in no sense doubtful. He would have known himself unworthy his high calling, had it been.

"You're blasphemous!" he exclaimed. "It is not for man to speak thus of the word of the Lord!"

"Is a man simply to go it blind?" sneered Barnaby.

"Yes!" exclaimed Craig. "Obey! That's all God has left to you — and be thankful he has left that much. You've nothing to do with consequences."

"Not even if the consequence is hell?"

"Not even if the consequence is hell," repeated the clergyman. "That is God's business, not yours. It's for you to obey: it's for Him to say finally whether you shall escape hell or not."

"A comforting doctrine!" sneered Barnaby.

"What has it to do with comfort or discomfort? You are to work out your salvation with fear and trembling —"

"Yes: but still to work it out," interrupted Barnaby.

"Neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase."

"You can find a Bible passage for anything," was Barnaby's attempted retreat.

"Don't forget that I'm a clergyman," said Craig, a note of personal irritation sounding in his voice.

"Don't be afraid," answered Barnaby. "I've got all the forgetting I can do in forgetting I was going to be one. You've not welcomed me to Padanaram yet."

"You've not told me what you have come for," said Craig, clearly implying that there were considerations even above the welcoming of a friend.

"I've come to see you," said Barnaby, with the note of disappointment in his voice at what, to one of his shallower nature, was simply a conditional greeting.

"I have put from me friendships," said Craig slowly and as one who so speaks a thing likely to seem offensive as to avoid, if possible, offence. "The clergyman has no right to ties other than those of the steward and servant of the Lord. I have ceased to know the individual, save as behind him is the soul to be saved."

"God gave us bodies as well."

"Yes, since we have them," said Craig, "and carnal lusts and vain desires;" showing no lack of courage in facing all that the other might urge. "They are the incarnate enemies of the Spirit which we must, at the price of eternal death, subdue."

"A rather large-sized task, for which we are mightily poorly equipped," said Barnaby.

"It's the grace of God alone that makes success even possible; and His, not ours, is the glory."

"That being the case," demanded the other; "don't you think His grace might have gone a little farther and spared us the whole thing?"

As they swung around the bend of the road, Barnaby on the outer curve and the clergyman deep in search for an answer to crush such hideous blasphemy, there came to view a tall slip of a girl, quaintly and coarsely dressed, and carrying a basket too heavy for her strength. A ray of sun stole under the broad rim of her hat of roughly plaited straw, and fell on a face that startled the younger man with a sense of intense sadness. Yet, when he looked again, he felt that he had read wrongly. The face was transfigured with a smile so softly radiant that it was sacrilege to associate with it even the thought of sorrow.

Craig turning his head, the bitter answer of his righteous wrath burning on his lips, caught and followed the direction of Barnaby's glance, and so perceived the girl.

"Good afternoon, sister Seagrave; are your mother and father well?"

In an instant she had passed, leaning sideways to balance the weight of the great basket, and as Barnaby tried to recall the face, it was the impress of sadness that was uppermost in the picture, so intense that he longed to run back and peep under the rough hat-brim, in the hope that he would see again that smile of tenderness. He gazed in wonder at Craig who, knowing the girl, could coldly ask of her a commonplace question.

"Don't you know," he demanded brusquely, as if Craig had already disputed him; "your sister Seagrave is — is — glorious?"

Craig turned and studied the bent figure, now passing from sight beyond the curve.

"I don't know what 'glorious' means applied to a human creature," he said slowly.

"Come, Craig!" exclaimed his companion, "that's carrying the thing a little too far! You're a man before you're a clergyman, and I know you can't look on a woman like that and not feel a thrill through your whole body. You know what I mean, you can't help it!"

"I do not know what you mean," said Craig coldly. "She's farmer Seagrave's daughter; a church member, whose interest is barely lukewarm. She taught the village school last spring, and I fear has notions above her station in life and not fitting a humble Christian woman. I know all these things; but I don't know what you are trying to tell me, and I don't want to know."

Barnaby felt a large sense of satisfaction that he had surprised all this information regarding the girl without asking for it, and he accepted the reprimand with a complacence that somewhat mollified Craig's displeasure,

since it was capable of interpretation as admission of error. Suddenly a thought occurred to the clergyman.

"Where are you stopping?"

"I sent my carpet-bag round to your boarding-place."

"I warn you," said Craig, "that I have nothing with which to entertain visitors. I have n't a penny that's my own."

"Have you taken a vow of perpetual poverty, as well?" demanded Barnaby, on whom the essential brutality of Craig's announcement made no real impress.

"I am God's trustee," Craig said. "Whatever comes to me comes for His service."

"Which forbids its being spent on me. I understand. But your boarding-house keeper can lodge and feed me?"

"You must ascertain that for yourself." It was the negation of hospitality, so far as its material side was concerned; but to Barnaby that side had no meaning in the absence of the informing spirit which he saw was absolutely impossible to the position Craig had chosen to occupy in the world. He felt no resentment: he did not even admit that his pride was hurt or his feelings outraged. "The foxes have holes; and the birds of the air nests," he could hear Craig saying; "but I have not where to lay my head." Was he to quarrel with him? It would have seemed to him a contest that concerned only the paltry price of his day's or week's board.

After supper, Craig sat with Barnaby for an hour on the grass in front of the house and then went to his room, without asking Barnaby to accompany him. The latter walked down the highway to the long curve where they had met the girl, and gazed away to the north, with an unspoken wonder as to which of the rare lights that twinkled among the hills was that of the Seagrave farm.

When he got back to the house, the widow Marlow was waiting to show him to his room.

"Can you board me for a week or two?" he asked sharply.

"I've only got the spare room" — she hesitated — "an' ef I should have comp'ny —"

"Are you expecting company?" he asked.

"No, not exactly expectin', leastwise not in the nex' day or two. But Mr. Marlow's brother hain't ben here sence Mr. Marlow died, an' he hain't said as he was comin' jest now, but ef he should, I would n't want not to hev a bed fur him —"

"How long since Mr. Marlow died?" asked Barnaby, thinking it possibly a recent occurrence.

"It'll be thirty-one year, come August."

"I think we are taking no great risk," he said, holding his face without a smile: "and moreover, I'll agree, if he comes, to slip away and leave you the room. I want to stay a fortnight or so, and I'll give you four dollars a week, if that's enough."

"Laws, I could n't think o' axin' more 'n three; an' I don't reckon it's wuth more 'n that; though I might, o' course, gin you so'shin' extry now an' then fur supper."

Barnaby recognised the mandate of Yankee thrift contending with Yankee honesty for the possession of the extra dollar, and realised that he must throw his weight with the first contestant.

"You know they always charge more for anyone that stays a little time; and then I'm likely to be a bit troublesome and particular. I guess you'd do well to take my offer."

"Wall, ef you put it that away, p'raps I'd better: but ef you don't get what you want, 't'll be your own fault,

an' ye must n't blame me. I hain't ben used to takin' keer of a man fur thirty year, till the pahson, he come goin' on two year ago, but that don't seem to help much, for he 's thet queer that sometimes, ef he was n't a min's-ter, I 'd think he war n't jest right. Anyway, nobody would n't larn nothin' 'bout takin' keer of a man, 'cause they 'd hed him to board."

CHAPTER VI

THE TWO FARMS

THERE was no phase of the life of the people among whom he had come to serve that was not thoroughly familiar to Craig. In all essentials, the community was a duplicate of that in which he was raised. In knowledge of his own past, he read these lives — the dumb, dull isolation and loneliness of youth; the sordid worldliness of middle life; the hopeless vacuity of age. He needed none to tell him of the temptations to which these lads were exposed; of the dangers alike to boys and girls in the freedom of country life; of the scars and woundings from the conflicts with material ill through which these dull, routine-burdened men and women had come. He read the turbulence of animal passion surging under the stolidity of these heavy-faced boys, who were already men in their knowledge of much of which town lads only guess. He saw, in the light of experience, opportunity walking hand in hand with precocious knowledge, unrestrained of judgment or the preventing grace which was the Christian's shield.

These things, however, lay in the realm of overt doing, not of speculative scepticism. They were not a call to doctrinal discourse, for there was no doctrinal unsoundness. In the face of orthodox belief, his preaching, like that of those who ignore orthodoxy as valueless, dealt almost wholly with conduct. He combatted the allurements of material sin with the material horrors of hell and the sufferings of the damned, wasting no time in

the pleasant task of proving what no one disputed. It was not that his hearers did not know the right from the wrong, but that, under the common heritage of Adam's children, they preferred sin and would follow it, unless they were driven into the paths of righteousness by the terror of punishment.

There was, therefore, nothing in his experience to fit him to deal with disbelief, avowed as Barnaby had avowed it. In his wildest moments, before conversion, he had never doubted the truths of Christianity, or the penalty that waits on sin. He had been the conscious law-breaker, never the denier of the law. He found it, moreover, difficult to shape argument to sustain that which is beyond argument. Indeed, he found argument impossible, and he simply dogmatised, overlooking the fact that dogma and assertion are essentially one to him whose first position is denial of dogma.

He had no fear for his parishioners. They would be as prompt as he to resent Barnaby's doctrinal heresies, in which there was nothing to arouse dormant imagination, which develops only along lines that define daily experience. His relation to Barnaby's scepticism was, therefore, without complication on this account. Neither was there any element of personal attachment, for he had never responded to the overtures which the lad had constantly made. In his absence, he was not conscious of ever having remembered his existence.

These conditions, instead of diminishing, enhanced the intensity of feeling aroused by the encounter. Stripped of all extraneous accidents, the naked fact confronted him of a soul buried in sin and doomed to eternal death. It was as if God sought to measure his devotion to His work as a thing abstract from all personality, and as he realised the greatness of the demand,

the passion of constraining desire to win this soul from eternal death dominated him.

All through the hours of the night, in that mean upper chamber, he wrestled with God in prayer, asking of Him the salvation of this lost soul, and when the two men met in the first flush of the July morning, for a plunge in the river, a keener observer than Barnaby must have read in the worn lines of the other's face the story of his sleepless night, though without reason for supposing its sleeplessness on his behalf.

Instead of this, Barnaby was filled with the joyousness of the new-born day, too young as yet to have taken to itself other attributes than those of beauty and innocence.

With the instincts of a farmer, which no years of priestly service would destroy, Craig valued the coming day from the point of utility.

"Warm and dry; a good day for the corn," he said.

Barnaby laughed. Nothing more clearly attested to Craig his lost condition than this predisposition to laughter. If one did but know it, a world, whose business is Eternity, is crowded full, without room for merriment. But Barnaby laughed and broke into profane rhyme:

Oh fair above the hills of June,
The promise of the day new-born,
The breeze has kissed the fields of corn,
And set its thousand leaves attune.

"Only," he apologised, "it's July; but at this hour you might guess it May."

The intense practicability of the peasant temperament asserted itself, in spite of the larger problem of the hour.

"May!" sneered Craig. "A man who can't see a sky of brass in this dry air and those sharply cut rays of light was born as blind as sin."

Barnaby laughed again. The very joy of life was in the hour and the scene.

"Kick against my poetry, if you want to, but you can't get away from the spirit. That sky of brass of yours is good, even if it is Hebraic."

Craig stared at him, dumb under the suggestion that there could be anything poetic in a sky of brass; but after they had taken their dip and were returning for breakfast, he got back to normal conditions and remembered his night of prayer. He plunged headlong into a discussion, which soon became a series of assertions on his part and of half-laughing protests on that of Barnaby, and left him, by the time they reached the house, irritable under the consciousness that he had not gone at his task in the best way.

After breakfast, Barnaby set off to find Blanket and give him instructions to bring over his trunk, which he had left tentatively at the station.

"You found a roostin'-place a'ter all," said Blanket. "I was a countin' on hevin' your comp'ny to the deepot."

"You owe me a mile's ride, anyhow," said Barnaby, climbing to the seat beside Blanket.

To his town-blunted senses the morning air was fresh and cool, and he took deep breaths, oblivious to the heat that was already taking strength of the sun. To Blanket, the east was ominous.

"Gee-whillikens," he said, starting his horse into a walk that was only a little faster than no movement at all; "I guess the sun 'll bust the top out'n the glass to-day. 'Pears like Padynarum must be nearer"—he pointed downward, in avoidance of the word—"than even the pahson guessed."

"Mebbe he left the door open last time he was down," suggested Barnaby.

Out on the road, Barnaby plied the driver with questions, giving him, to his surprise, no chance to ask his own in turn. At last, he asked:

"Any Seagraves about here?"

"We're 'bout all some kinder graves," said Blanket. "Thar's plain Graves, an' thar's Ashgraves, an' thar's Seagraves. Ye kin jest catch sight o' the top o' th' old barn through thet break in them woods. Be ye any kin to 'em?"

"I reckon so," Barnaby answered, "if it's the one I mean. Got a daughter who kept school ——"

"Thet's him," declared Blanket. "Tarnal smart gal she is tu, 'specially when she's got her Sunday-go-to-meetin' clothes on. Was your mother a Seagrave?"

"No," said Barnaby. "It's farther off than that. Pretty good farm?"

"Thar hain't no better. Best orchard in the county, an' thar hain't nothin' in the way of a sugar-camp in the State to beat his'n. Mebbe your father's mother was a Seagrave?"

"I don't know just how close the connection is," said Barnaby, "but it's somewhere this side of Adam. Will this lane take me any where near the farm?"

"It'll take ye up past the sugar-camp, an' you kin see the way from thar, ef ye hain't melted by the time you get thar. I'd rayther hev a hoss cart me round to-day than my legs."

Barnaby sprung from the stage and started up the lane, but was brought to a sudden stop by a loud,

"Say!"

The horse had come to a full stop, and the driver was leaning forward flecking the dust with his whip. Barnaby came back to the side of the stage, in recognition of the claims that the man's patience gave him.

"What did ye say yer name might be?" Blanket demanded, in return of Barnaby's inquiring glance.

"I don't remember what I said it might be," the other answered, "but I don't mind saying it might be James Buchanan."

"An' what be it?" asked Blanket, driven to a direct question.

"Francis Barnaby; I come from Newburyport, Massachusetts; I studied theology a year and did n't like it, and I 'm going to be a lawyer, if I 've got brains enough. I come over here to see your parson, and I 'm going to stay a while, because I like the place; I 'm twenty-four years old and I 'm not even in love, let alone married."

"I guess ye hain't tried the Maine gals yet," said Blanket. "Ef fellers up here had to marry ev'ry time they fell in love, this would be the most bigimous state in the hull Union."

"In such a superfluity of riches, how do they ever decide?" asked Barnaby.

"Most gin'rally they go a leetle too fur an', snap! than you be. I got caught that-a-way myself once, an' ef I 'd ben wuth the trouble I would n't a' ben left to the peace and quietness of widderhood fur fifteen year, as I hev ben."

Barnaby was turning away again, when Blanket took up the conversation anew.

"Hev ye looked her over eny? The widder Marlow, I mean."

"Not particularly. She makes good biscuit."

"Thet 's a recommend. She seems to hev a putty even temper; the pahson's boarded thar fur over a year."

"Is that a test?" laughed Barnaby.

"I donno. Ef I thought he talked much to her, I 'd

say 'yas'; but it may be he don't. Could n't you find out fur me?"

"Is it a question between her and somebody else?"

"Nope. I 'm past thet. I 'm kinder lookin' fur a soft seat an' easy drivin'. She 's got that property, an' it 's clar of all encumbrances; an' so 's she. Not a chick or a child in the world. It looks sorter invitin'."

"Do you want my advice?"

"It 's jest what I du want, only I was sorter lawth to ax it. Ben kinder diffident all my life; but I 'd think a heap of it."

"I 'd ask her."

Barnaby was away again up the lane, and behind him he heard the slow cluck of the driver and the creaking of the old stage, as it started again stationward. He was acting with no more clearly defined purpose than when he decided to remain at Padanaram. He may not have had a fully shaped hope, in taking his way up the lane, of seeing the Seagrave girl again; but he was too proud of his own candour to deny, even to himself, that she was just now the motive force in his acts. He had declared her glorious, and he felt no call to modify the adjective in the slightest; yet back of this consciousness of beauty there was the haunting power of that first sight of her face with its impress of deep sadness. What had there been in the girl's uneventful life to leave that ineffaceable stamp? To his youthfulness there could be but one catastrophe sufficient to the riddle, and to this the second glimpse of her face had given the lie. If she had loved, she must have been loved in turn. He had gone far in his wool-gathering, and laughed at himself for his pains; for he could laugh at himself as well as at others.

At the crown of the hill, beyond the sugar-camp, the

farm lay before him with its land rolling and sloping toward the South and West, to the level acres that skirted the river. The orchard, of which Blanket had spoken, lay in a sheltered hollow of the lower hills, which shut off the eastern and northern winds, and stored the sun and the warm southern breezes to be distilled again in nectar in the juices of great red and yellow apples.

Two vast barns dominated the farm. They stood with doors flung wide, and mows, empty of last year's wealth, cavernous for the sweet breathed crop of new hay which lay in cocks and winrows, or in broad fresh-cut swaths, over the mowing lands. In the distance, boys and men were loading the fully cured hay onto great ox-carts, and Barnaby fancied among them the gleam of a petticoat, and thereupon began again to wonder of many things.

These thoughts brought his straying eyes back to the buildings where they stood, barns and cribs, smoke-house and sheds, under the shelter of the hills, with the farmhouse itself well in front and imposing still, though dwarfed by the greater barns. It was four-square and staunch, two-storied in front, with a low sloping roof behind, which cut off the second story. Square and central, a chimney, suggestive of many flues, sent out no single spiral of smoke. A wood-shed, with winter doors now flung wide, stretched from the kitchen side and gave passage also to a low building where in winter the hot messes for poultry, pigs and cattle were prepared. Back of the house was a broad expanse of vegetable garden, in contrast with which a few scrimped and narrow flower beds were doleful and pathetic. In front of the wood-shed were great piles of birch and hickory, awaiting the axe and saw, the space well covered with chips and cluttered with chopping-blocks. The fields were separated

by stone walls, loosely laid without cement, the openings protected by bars. An immense elm towered before the house on either side of the main doorway. The scene gave Barnaby the impress of active thrift, in which the almost silent house stood strangely incongruous. It was as if that which should have been the soul of the whole was sleeping or dead.

With a townsman's regard for metes and bounds, he questioned of means for reaching the highway without trespassing. The natural objection to this was complicated by the possibility of encountering the girl as the objecting person. He turned to the country behind him for a possible escape from a return by the lane, which presented itself to his mind as a retreat.

Beyond the height on which he stood, shut in to isolation by other hills, was a second farm, filling a cup-like hollow from which a rutted road led in the direction of the highway. There was a low, one-storied, unpainted house, with the ever present wood-shed ell; a barn whose dilapidation showed even at this distance; a crib, the seasonable emptiness of which was revealed by the swinging door, and straggling walls half buried in brambles and poison ivy. Against the house a show of red seemed at first a splash of paint, which on close looking revealed a climbing rose, rich with blossoms.

Almost directly beneath him, a man bent above his scythe, before which long swaths of ripe grass fell, as he moved down the little field. His bent form gave the impress of age, which the vigour of his strokes belied; and when finally he straightened at the end of the field, Barnaby saw the face and form of a young giant.

This man, moving up and down the field with the regularity of a shuttle driven by a weaver's hand, intensified to Barnaby the sense of solitude that the scene

itself conveyed. He had always seen men working in companies, but here was a man who seemed to have built himself into a cell of isolation, where he laboured as if labour was the end of being instead of a mere means thereto. The thought had fascination to him and he threw himself on the sun-warmed earth and watched the human shuttle swept back and forth by the master force of controlling purpose.

CHAPTER VII

THE TEMPEST

BARNABY awoke under a feeling of undefined but terrible suffering. The noonday sun was pouring full upon him, and the air seemed to burn and sting as he breathed. His brain was like molten fire. He sat up and was conscious of a sense of nausea. Mechanically he glanced into the valley. Something was happening there that startled him out of the thrall of his own suffering.

The man had ceased mowing, and was raking together and loading on to an ox-wagon the hay that had been spread that morning for final curing. He was working with tremendous energy that was doubly dreadful under the relentless blaze of that terrible sun. As he worked, he glanced almost momently to the south, as if in watch on the source of his energy and fear.

Barnaby staggered to his feet and looked southward. From beyond the horizon great black and purple clouds were rolling up, slow and grand, but in their very slowness fulfilled with a sense of power, terrible and relentless. As they advanced, they blotted out the heavens and there remained only themselves.

Barnaby understood the terror that was driving the man to his superhuman efforts. It was a race between himself and the storm for the possession of the hay which, thoroughly cured, would be ruined by the coming rain. A keen sense came to him of the terrible odds against the man, with the tempest and God as his opponents,

and he darted down the sharp decline, tearing away his coat and waistcoat as he ran. He burst into the field with the demand:

"What can I do?"

"Rake it into loose cocks, like this!" the man accepted him. "I can load faster 'n you."

Swiftly Barnaby raked, and with equal swiftness the man pitched the cocks into the wagon. He handled his strength with the lightness of a slighter man and the ease of custom. Slowly the great clouds lifted themselves toward the zenith and the day grew dark. As the last cock was pitched on to the towering load, the man called, with a voice that sounded weird and far-away in the strange silence:

"See that the barn doors are open and the floor clear. We 've won, if I can get these beasts out of a walk."

As he hurried toward the barn, the man called again: "Take your coat and vest. You 'll have no time to save 'em later."

He cleared the space between the mows and stood in the great doorway watching, with a sense of helplessness, the final struggle between the man and the storm. The heavily laden wagon creaked and swung across the stretch of meadow, while beside it was the man shouting and prodding the oxen with the merciless goad. Behind, the clouds rolled nearer, their masses torn and whipped by the force of winds as yet unfelt on the earth's surface. Great billows of darkness swept down, as if reaching for the puny antagonist who had dared to pit his strength with the tempest, and then rolled back again, as if, sure of their prey, they were willing to tantalise him with the hope of escape. It seemed to Barnaby as if he must rush out and push and pull the wagon

over the narrow space that still held it from safety. Up the final ascent the oxen toiled, in a blackness that was worse than the blackness of night. Then, as if a sheet of flame had run from the low-lying clouds to the earth, the weird, white fire of the lightning revealed the blackness of the last farthest point of the heavens, and even before it faded, air and earth shook with the terrible reverberations of the thunder. The oxen sprang, terror-stricken, into the shelter of the barn. Barnaby and the man seized the great doors and pulled them shut. As they turned the bar that fastened them, the fury of the rain, frantic to be thwarted, dashed in floods against the barriers.

Through the dusk of the great barn sounded the beating of the torrents of rain, the twittering of swallows from the cavernous darkness above, and the soft sighs of the passive oxen. The two men knew that the moment for speech had come, and a strange awkwardness, in sharp contrast to the ease with which they had worked together, seized them. Barnaby, reeking with perspiration, felt a chill strange to the heat of the day, and was putting on his coat and waistcoat.

"I could n't have saved it without you," said the big fellow shyly. "It fixes my taxes all right. I don't know how to thank you."

"Let the tax-gatherer do that," retorted Barnaby, "he seems to be the gainer."

"Oh, he 'd get his part all right," the other answered him. "Last year I had to sell my calves, instead of raising 'em."

"Do you sell hay?"

"Not till I 've turned it into yearlings. Wait a jiffy, till I unyoke and fodder the beasts, an' we 'll go to the house and hunt some grub."

As he worked, the man talked on with odd intonation, as he unshipped a bow or threw down some hay:

"You 're Parson Craig's company, I 'spose: the one that 's going to preach next Sabbath."

"I 'm over here to see Mr. Craig, but I 'm not going to preach next Sabbath or any other time," laughed Barnaby.

"Well, I thought 't was queer if a parson could take hold o' things the way you did. Mostly they work so hard Sabbaths, they have to rest just as hard the rest of the week. By the way, my name 's Joseph Ashgrave."

"And mine Francis Barnaby. I told Blanket, the stage driver, my history this morning, so I guess there 's no need of repeating it."

"You 're on to him, I see. He 's cheaper than the county paper and more entertaining. There, that 's done. Now we 'll make the house, if you 've no objection to going by the cellar. It 's a little darker, but a heap sight dryer. By the way, I live all alone; so you 'll have to take bachelor's luck."

They dropped into the cellar of the barn, and at the extreme end found a low wooden door which opened into a narrow passage leading under the wood-shed to the cellar of the house. From there the stairs led directly to the kitchen. There, before a fire newly kindled in the great fireplace, sat a girl drying her wet skirts. She turned her head to the noise of their entrance, and Barnaby recognised the girl he had met the day before on the highway. Ashgrave sprang forward, with a lilt of pleasure in his voice as he exclaimed:

"Why, 'Mandy! Where under the sun ——"

"Under the rain, you mean;" then, as she recognised Barnaby, she checked herself and a flush of embarrassment stole up her throat and over her face.

"I was on the upper hill, berrying," she went on, in an effort to appear natural, "and the rain caught me."

"You mean, did n't catch you," Ashgrave caught her up in retaliation. "If it had, you 'd a been drowned. Oh, Mr. Barnaby, 'Mandy.'

She came forward for the inevitable hand-shaking with an ease Barnaby had not anticipated. He had a sense of pleasure in her slim figure, clad in a print dress, that in its very simplicity escaped obtrusiveness; and again the face, which had so impressed him with sadness at first, was lighted by a smile so rare that he could think of no other fitting word, save the one he had used to Craig, "glorious." Yet — and this notwithstanding he despised himself for it — he noted that the hand she laid in his was rough and reddened with work.

He greeted her as "Miss Seagrave," and Ashgrave, who seemingly had purposely omitted mention of her name, started, while a queer look of suspicion drew his eyes together under his scowling brows, in a manner far from pleasant.

"Unless you 're going to turn me out," the girl said, turning to Ashgrave, "I 'll make myself useful and get you some dinner."

"If you don't go till I turn you out, we 'll have to send for the parson to save scandal," he retorted. Barnaby, who had begun to know himself drawn toward the fellow, felt his blood tingle at the coarseness of the jest, in sympathy with the flush that overspread the girl's face.

The girl walked to the window and looked out on the rain still falling in wind-driven torrents, and then began to spread the table and set out the simple meal. Barnaby questioned with himself whether it was ignorance or ugliness on Ashgrave's part, and was equally inclined to either solution. He was perplexed as well at the

familiarity which the girl showed with the house, as manifested by the quickness of her coming and going. Ashgrave aided, evidently more to keep near the girl than because he cared to assist, but Barnaby was impressed that she sought to avoid contact with him, and also that as her effort became apparent, Ashgrave's surliness was more marked. Indeed, by the time the meal was ready, it had grown to such a degree that he would gladly have foregone eating and taken his way homeward, but for the rain — and the girl.

He had come to the determination not to leave her there, forgetful that she had taken shelter without the least expectation possible, save that she would be alone with Ashgrave. He was certain that Ashgrave wished him away; but he failed to comprehend the possibility that the girl's embarrassment — no less than Ashgrave's surliness — was due to his presence, rather than any real resentment of Ashgrave's actions.

Ashgrave hesitated a moment after they had seated themselves, and then asked the conventional blessing, without which a New England meal was rarely begun. The girl seemed to expect it, and took it as a matter of course.

Ashgrave had brought up from the cellar a pitcher from which he poured into a cheap glass a dark amber-rich liquor on top of which bubbles foamed and burst.

"Have some sweet cider?" he asked.

"Sweet cider, at this time of year!" Barnaby exclaimed.

"Since the Neal Dow law, cider don't grow hard in Maine any more. It's against the law. We'd jug it, if it did."

"And drink it as long as it does n't," the girl added. "The law's better than mustard seed."

If there was no attempt on their part to make talk, it struck Barnaby it was not because they were too sullen, but rather because they did n't know how. For himself, he felt that with either he would have found silence unnecessary; and he knew that but for him they would have made the meal vocal with tumultuous chatter, no less satisfying because inconsequential.

One thing was certain, the tremendous spirit of energy with which Ashgrave had worked at saving the hay was gone, and this not through any appearance of fatigue, but rather because of a mental indolence that made some physical incentive necessary to the excitation of the will. Under other environments, with his tremendous physical powers, he would have been the dreaming sensualist, whom cumulative passion swept at intervals into unrestrainable fury. Barnaby did not analyse this condition, he simply felt it; and it stirred him with a sense of the unsafety of the girl in thrusting herself, as it seemed to him, into relations with such a nature. For, from the start, he did not think of her as in love with Ashgrave, but rather as attracted by him; or, what seemed a more hazardous imagining, as disposed to experiment with him. He instinctively applied to the actual situation the measure of a society more complex, even though, in reality, markedly simple.

The air grew comparatively cool with the passing of the tempest, and Barnaby, learning that his road to the village led past the Seagrave farm, proposed to walk with the girl.

"She ain't ready to go yet," said Ashgrave, with a strong indication that the fact need not interfere with Barnaby's departure.

The earnest thanks which Ashgrave gave him for his help in saving the hay, manœuvred him out of the

house as skilfully as it could have been done under a more artificial régime, and as he wandered down the cart track toward the main road, he glanced back at each turn with the dual question whether he had done rightly in leaving them together and how, in all conscience, he could have done differently. He imagined he had read a protest in the girl's eyes, yet she had neither objected to his leaving nor proposed by any word to accompany him. It was the more intolerable because he was not quite certain that the girl understood she ought not to stay.

CHAPTER VIII

THE QUARREL

WHILE Barnaby was within possible range of voice, Ashgrave remained at the window watching the drenched meadows and saying nothing. The girl had cleared the table and was washing the dishes, with a nervous quickness that was clearly anticipatory. At last Ashgrave turned, slowly, with no note of sudden anger either in voice or manner. He seemed following a part he had determined in advance.

"Well?"

She turned from the dish-pan, holding a plate in her hand, with an assumed air of not forecasting, which was denied by the drawn lines of her forehead.

"Well?" he repeated, more sharply and dominantly.

"Well. What?"

"You've met him before."

She turned to her dish-pan and flung back over her shoulder,

"I saw him on the road yesterday."

He took two strides across the kitchen, and seizing her by the shoulder turned her sharply until he looked down into her eyes. A sudden flame of anger swept into his face, the more appalling because without apparent cause.

"Let me alone, Joe Ashgrave!" She deepened her voice, but without increasing the volume. It was as if she held her anger under the dominance of an impulse to plead, rather than storm.

"I'll let you alone when I know the truth and not before," he retorted. "You've seen him before you saw him yesterday."

"It's none of your business, if I have." The perversity of unreason seized her, and the recognition of his brutality impelled her to refuse to appease him.

He tightened his grip on her shoulder till she grew pale with pain, and then with a sudden thrust sent her spinning into a chair that stood by the fireplace. The cup she held in her hand fell on the hearth and broke into a score of bits.

"You're a strumpet!" he cried. "You're a — a — woman!" His voice rose almost to a bellow, and the scorn he threw into the last word had all the sting and insult of the gross word he had been on the point of using.

She looked on him from her chair, the pain still torturing her face, and gathered herself to fling back the insult, as she knew she could. The sense of fear was gone, and with it the disposition to plead. There seemed an instinct in her voice that held it to tones rather below than above the ordinary.

"You are a — man; a man, like your father."

His face grew white, under its sunburn, and he started toward her, his hands reaching out and clutching at the air, the fingers bent and quivering, as if he felt within them the soft whiteness of her throat. She watched him without an effort to avoid him, but when he was within a yard of her she suddenly asked:

"Is that the way your father killed your mother?"

He staggered, as if it were a blow and not words he had met. He threw up his hands to his face and, dropping into a chair, let his head fall heavily to the table.

She sat and looked at him as if she were studying

some strange creature. After a pause, without a show of passion or resentment in her voice, she said:

"When you can be sensible, we'll talk." It was her way of saying that she had thrown this at him as her weapon of defence, not as implying any shame to him. Now that she had conquered and was through with it, they could turn to things that concerned them. Without experience to measure the effect of her mood, she showed him the indifference his anger had for her, and so touched the quick of his personal pride more deeply than had the slurs upon his father.

Slowly he raised his head and the flame of his anger turned to sensual passion. A savage joy thrilled him that he had her in his power, and that as he willed so must she be. It was the brute breaking bounds, yet glad with the intelligence of man in the fallen shackles.

"You play with me!" he said, sharply, yet with a depth that mere sharpness lightened without revealing.

She caught the changed tone, and something in it or in his lifted face warned her of danger. She ceased to play the indifferent, while every faculty became alert for her defence.

"You play with yourself," she said. "We're not married — yet."

"You'll wish we were, when this day is over," and through the bellow the animality of the beast alone vibrated.

The very atmosphere seemed charged to danger. She was afraid of him; she was afraid of herself. Something of herself seemed to answer this cry of strength and desire and, without destroying the wish to resist, to paralyse the will. She fled to weakness, where the cover of strength was lacking.

"I've had no wish in that matter but yours," she said, with a dim purpose of delay.

"You lie!" he said. "You know you've been afraid; and you had reason to be." He had risen and was standing over her, his muscles twitching, his nostrils wide and his breathing heavy and quick. She was so weak; it was all that kept him from seizing her.

"No, I have n't feared you," she said, and she held her eye on his, master of herself to that extent for the moment. "I have loved you."

"You don't know what love means," he answered. "If you had, you'd been mine long ago."

"Look!" she cried and pointed to the window. A shadow seemed to pass it, and he sprang to shoot the bolt. On the instant, she leaped from her chair and, with the strength of a country-bred girl, pushed the kitchen-table down upon him. Then she darted through the door into the next room and, before he could reach it, shot the bolt.

He stood a moment in the chagrin of his defeat and then found in resistance new incitement.

"Mandy," he cried, through the door, "you did n't think I meant to hurt you, did you?"

"I know you did," came the answer. "Your father killed your mother, and you would me."

His anger came up again at this taunt, battling with and yet inciting lust; but he held himself to his new plan, though the second passion asserted itself in his tone:

"No, no! I did n't mean to kill you. I love you too much."

"But it would have killed me. You know that. I'm going now."

"Don't 'Mandy, till you've opened the door and said you don't believe I'd hurt you."

"I won't say that, for I know you would. I'm going."

"If you go without opening that door and saying we're friends, it's the end of everything between us." It was the dominant note now; the masterhood of might and position.

"I can't do that, Joe;" and he read in the tone the fear his words had roused. "You can come to-night."

"If you won't trust me now, you'll never have another chance." He held firm to his vantage.

So back and forth came and went answer and plea, till, gradually dropping the masterful manner, he pleaded at last in the name of his love and loneliness.

"You don't know what it is to live all alone. If you did, you'd come to me without waiting. I feel sometimes I should go wild. Why don't you love me?"

"Oh Joe, you know I do. I'd come now, only father and mother —".

"What are they, if you love me?" He was the brute again in his anger. Then, checking this tone, he took up the pleading. "You won't go without a kiss, 'Mandy? Oh, 'Mandy, if you knew, if you knew! I know I'm savage; but who would n't be, living all alone? Your being here, where you ought to be always, where you belong, where you've got to be, and be always; it drove me wild. I did n't know what I was doing; but 't was you, you, 'Mandy. Nobody else could. Oh, 'Mandy, 'Mandy! I love you, I love you! I can't, I can't wait!"

The picture of his loneliness, conjured in his words, overwhelmed him. He seemed to himself utterly deserted, and a great gasp of pity for his desolation welled up from his chest. That cry of his soul in desolation accomplished all of which his words and pleadings

had failed. The bolt was forced back, the door opened, and the girl stood on the threshold, looking down on him where he knelt beside the door. He sprang to his feet, seized her in his great arms, and ravished kisses from her, unresisting.

CHAPTER IX

THE SABBATH-DAY

ON SUNDAY, the hosts of the Lord came up to Padanaram to the preaching. From the tired farm-wife to the toddlekins of two years; from the sun-wearied farmer to the lusty lad to whom the flash of the river was invitation, there was not one to whom it was not a task. It was a throng lashed by an inherited concept of duty, in which the living spirit was long since dead. The task was flavoured, not lessened, by the social instinct, and the hope, old as Mars Hill, of something new in the sermon of the stranger; for only a few had yet learned that he was not a clergyman.

Ashgrave came, driven of devils, that had tormented him since the day of Barnaby's and Amanda Seagrave's visit. When the reaction came from the crisis of that tremendous hour, it seemed to him that he had broken down walls that had concealed himself and, for the first time in his life, he looked into the deeps of his own soul. The sight had dazed, had horrified him. He was afraid, not of others, but of himself. He knew there was no wrong that a man could do of which he was not capable.

Amanda Seagrave came in the wild rage of concealment, and the equally wild hope of seeing Barnaby. She knew now that it was not Ashgrave who had caused that pulse of joy when the two men entered the kitchen, and in the moments left her as respite ere the question of her own future pressed for settlement, she was too womanly — too human — to deny herself the hope

that the chord of dead joy might thrill again, though it were never so feebly.

Whatever secrets other hearts bore with them to the preaching, these two were those whose cry for the priest-healer was the most poignant, and to these Simeon Craig answered with the text, "For there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." He builded his argument with the more perfection because with him argument was artificiality. As a rule he drove to the end with a directness that forced obstacles aside rather than surmounted them, and left clear and defined the end itself, whatever might be said of the line of thought by which it was reached. The heroism of such method would have responded to the demand of their hurt, and instead he gave them platitudes.

Even Barnaby failed to understand the sermon, guessing a tragedy which he made no attempt to measure. The uncompromising critics, with the feeling of loss of the weekly excitation of fear, were outspoken in charging weakness, and the two sick souls who were looking Eternal Death in the face, turned away faint with the sting of indifference.

Barnaby strove, at the close of the service, for a chance to speak to Miss Seagrave, and when he saw that she was plainly purposed to avoid him, he turned instead to Ashgrave, who greeted him heartily and seemed to cling to him. The man was clearly not a favourite with the elder people, and while the half-grown lads thronged about him, it was with a show of fear, as if the attraction was in doing a forbidden thing. Ashgrave had, apparently, walked, and Barnaby kept pace with him, chatting, as he left the church-yard, answering only the scant nods of recognition given him.

Ashgrave paused at the wall, where a footpath crossed the fields in his home direction.

"If you care to come," he said, "come. I'm always there. You see my popularity."

"You're more like Craig than any one I ever met," said Barnaby, speaking his revolt against the two men, rather than answering the half invitation.

"Alike! I'd like to preach one sermon — just one! Do you think men would forget it?"

"What would be your text?"

"Hell!" The word was like a cry from the very soul of the man. It was a cry of terror, a confession of sin, all that the heart could utter, save the plea for salvation.

"Don't you think they've had enough of that?" asked Barnaby, seeking to break the strain of the impression made on him.

"Enough!" He leaped the wall and strode away without turning his head again.

"I would n't have too much to do with young Ashgrave, if I were you." Craig threw out the hint as they were at dinner, a meagre meal, without an article of Sabbath cooking or warming.

"Do you know, if I was his clergyman, I would n't think I could have too much to do with him." Barnaby felt the secret soul of the man in the cry he still heard.

"The physician forbids others the patient he himself strives to cure. There is no hour of the day or night that I'm not at Ashgrave's call. If I was sitting at the communion table, and he sent for me, I should leave and go."

"Do you think you would know if he did send for you?" demanded Barnaby. "Such men don't put their needs into words."

To Craig's material comprehension of intellectual or

spiritual processes, the conception of a demand that did not express itself in words was impossible. He had actually heard the call that summoned him from the plow to the pulpit, and it would as soon have entered his mind to question the voice that spoke to Paul on the road to Damascus, as that which he had heard in the ploughed field.

"Unless I should become suddenly blind or deaf," he replied scornfully, and Barnaby, who perceived his inability to understand, let the matter pass.

In turn he hinted at certain tag ends of Ashgrave's story which had been caught by him, and sought the thread that would bring them into fit relation one to another. But Craig was an inverse gossip. He absorbed, but never gave, and Barnaby gained nothing for his pains.

So, to escape the afternoon preaching, with a possible second sermon addressed to his supposed need, he slipped away and wandered into the hills, taking, without particular thought, the direction of the Seagrave farm. There was a touch of defiance, even for him, in a Sunday afternoon walk that gave it a charm of its own; and when at last he was stretched on the warm earth, just out of the sun, where through the heavy trees he could catch glimpses of the river, while below him was the peaceful farm, he had a sense of the goodness of life that survives even doctrinal sermons, informed of good intentions and unconquerable stupidity.

There was a rustle behind him, and looking up, upon a point of rock that jutted from the very top of the hill he saw Miss Seagrave, outlined against the background of the sky. She evidently imagined herself alone, and Barnaby was divided between the chance of disturbing her by revealing himself and the indelicacy of watching

her unseen. He knew enough of the Sabbatical demands of such a community as Padanaram to understand that there was something almost epochal in her presence there during sermon-time. Sharply the thought flashed upon him that she was there to meet Ashgrave, who, he well understood, would easily set at defiance rules that scarcely another would venture to question. It surprised him that he should care if such a meeting was to take place, but he admitted that he did care, and then he felt a sense of resentment against Ashgrave for proposing it, which did not prevent his being angered at Miss Seagrave for consenting.

For he had no doubt that Ashgrave had proposed it and that Miss Seagrave's part was consent merely, the more as he had caught in the morning no note of recognition between them. More than he had in the morning, he felt the effectual holding of Ashgrave at a distance which had signalled his treatment at the meeting, and he asked himself why it was that with this before her Miss Seagrave should adopt an opposite mood and meet him thus secretly.

The girl settled all questions for Barnaby by seating herself on the rock, with the manifest purpose of remaining. If she had a tryst, it was here, and there was nothing for Barnaby but to reveal himself, as he must, if he attempted to leave.

She greeted him with that rare smile, which he had already learned to look for as something noteworthy. Youth and health rebel under sorrow, and will have none of it, save on compulsion. There has been so little, in comparison with all there is to be, that even the greatest wrong may hope for compensation.

"I thought I was the only one who had dodged the sermon," Barnaby said, standing for her dismissal.

"One of the horses was sick, so we could n't go," she explained.

"I used to play sick, when I was a youngster," he said. "I don't suppose the horse was up to that trick?"

"What for? He would n't have had to hear the sermon."

"There was n't the flavour this morning I expected," he ventured, watching for any sign that he had overstepped.

The thought of what she had failed to find in the sermon came back and clouded her brow. She felt again the hot air of the crowded church, and looked off to the cross seats near the pulpit, where she saw Ashgrave, with his clouded, sullen face, gazing straight ahead of him. She knew again what he was remembering. As great as was her pity for herself, she had some to spare for him, and it centred on the discovery she had made that she did not love and never had loved him. He had so little in life, it seemed a double pity to rob him of even so poor a thing as her love. Suddenly she brought herself back to the fact that Barnaby was saying "good-bye."

"You 'll find it a pleasanter walk when the sun is lower," she said, almost without feeling the meaning of the words.

He, however, caught it, and stopped in pleasant surprise. It could scarcely be that she was expecting Ashgrave, or she would not have checked his going.

"May I?" he asked, indicating his wish to throw himself on the soft moss that made an inviting couch.

So they chatted on, and again she forgot the great barrier that divided her life and closed the past. She told him of the single year when she left the farm behind, and the great pleasure of life as she found it in the little

academy town, which she bore in her memory in the proportions due to the widest experience that had fallen to her lot. She had come back to her year of teaching at Padanaram, and now she was again at the farm.

"It is closed!" she said, and he smiled at the half-tragic tone, guessing nothing of the double meaning of the words.

Then she drew from him his confession; his quarrel with his father; his resolve to become a clergyman; his dawning consciousness that he had yielded to a whim and had no depth of purpose; his final sudden revolt against his own folly, and his reconciliation with his father.

"He's a pretty jolly old fellow," he assured her, "if you only let him have his own way."

She listened with her eyes intent upon him, her elbow on her knee and her chin resting in her hand. Suddenly she asked:

"Ought we always to obey others?"

He thought not, but at least one ought to know his purpose, ought to have it clearly defined, have considered it thoroughly, and determined it as his rule of life, before he ventured to break from parental authority.

"Do you think it no disgrace to own yourself mistaken in an important — in the most important matter of life?"

He thought her still dwelling on the story he had told, and he turned the query aside. One would have his whims, and find them whims; 't would be a jolly tough thing to have to keep on just because you'd got started.

He walked with her down to the farm, where his association with the clergyman was warrant to secure him an invitation to supper. His presence at the meal kept the two tow-headed boys and their mother in

fidgety silence, while the farmer discoursed to him on the equivalence in the original Greek of "baptism" and "immersion."

"Then you do not consider sprinkling baptism," Barnaby said, feeling that there was a little too much of assertion and not enough of variety for discussion.

"It's no consequence what I consider," the farmer declared positively. "It's facts thet matters; it's truth thet tells. If I consider a hoss an ox, it don't make it one. Thar are folks who consider the Pope a Christian; but he hain't, all the same."

Barnaby felt that he had the flavour of the old farmer's dictatorship, and wondered if the daughter could not have told a tale of stunted individuality which had helped write into her face that something that at first glance seemed to him so full of sadness. Then he recalled something else she had said to him as curious, which now had a new meaning:

"Mr. Ashgrave is never mentioned in our house."

He saw clearly that here was a man who would not let sentiment interfere with the rule of his household; a man who would rule for the love of ruling, yet cover his rule with the mantle of duty. Before he could check himself, his imagination had galloped with him far beyond his starting point and suddenly brought him up, hard and fast, against the query of what were the relations between Miss Seagrave and Ashgrave. He saw the visit to the other farmhouse in a new light, that pleased him no more than its old aspect. Finally, all the consolation he drew out of the matter was the indisputable fact that she evidently was not expecting Ashgrave on the hills that afternoon, and that she had been at pains to let him know that he was not to run away.



CHAPTER X

THE ASHGRAVES

THE next morning, to unravel some of the tangles, Barnaby sought Blanket, the stage driver, and mounted on the seat beside him gossiped through the first half of the journey to the station, thereby bestowing on Blanket the keenest pleasure that could come into his life.

"That critter, Ashgrave," he said, letting the lines hang loose on the back of the horse, that moved at a pace between a slow walk and a dead stop, "is 'bout as o'ney as a bile dish. Thar hain't no denyin' he come honestly by it, fur ef the Gov'ner 'd wanted somebody as moderator to a meetin' of all the cussed crooked sticks in Maine, his father 'd ben the chice of ev'ry man that knew him. They du say that when th' Ol' Feller found that Reuben Ashgrave 'd got a ticket fur his dominion, he kicked like a brindle steer in fly-time, an' come nigh throwin' up his job."

"What was the trouble with him?" Barnaby asked.

Blanket looked at him as if to ask what he thought he was made of to be able to answer such a question.

"Ef thar war enything that war n't the matter with him," he said finally, "'t was cause thar war n't room in one tarnal carkis fur it all to get in. The wust thing about him, ef thar war eny wust thing, was that he war the gol-durndest nicest man that ever lived when he was nice, and the durndest, ugliest whelp of Satan, when he war n't. Ef he only could hev bottled up his temper fur use, thar 'd ben no need o' blastin' powder."

Barnaby felt the picture of the man and saw in it the logical reason for the man he knew. It occurred to him, however, that in the course of nature there must be a mother somewhere in the arrangement, and he asked of her. Blanket dropped his voice and looked uneasily from under the brim of his rough straw hat.

"She war from down the river som'wheres," he said. "Reuben hed one o' his quarrels with his father 'n up an' lit out, an' when he cum back, jest like a chicken or a cuss, he brought her with him. It stood to reason, o' course, they'd ben married, 'cause when it's so easy, nobody but a tarnal fool'd take the chances, an' anyway, I guess she war n't thet kind. They du say she war a schoolmarm, an' anyway she could talk like a book an' you'd set all night to hear her, ef you did n't get sleepy, she war thet grammatical. The ol' folks did n't last long a'ter he cum back, an' then they hed it all their own way up thar in thet hole in the hills, an' a'ter Joe come — thet's this one — they said he acted more like folks, an' she hed a easier time. I guess, though, 't was hard enough, fur she grew about five year old ev'ry year, an' was nigh on to sixty when Reuben killed her."

"Killed her!" exclaimed Barnaby. "Killed his wife?"

Blanket nodded slowly and with a gossip's delight in the climax of his story.

"Thet's what I sed," he answered, "an' I hain't afeered o' bein' took up fur slander 'cause I say it. 'T was one night when the wind was blowin' like all possessed, when ol' man Seagrave — he war n't's old then by ten year as he be now — felt somebody a shakin' him an' he kinder opened his eyes, and thar by his bed stood Joe Ashgrave a cryin' an' with a lantern in his hand, an' he ses, ses he, 'Mammy's fell down stairs an'

hurt herself an' dad sent me to get you to go fur the doctor.' In course he went, an' when they got thar, thar was Mis' Ashgrave a layin' on the kitchen floor stun dead, an' Reuben a kneelin' down by her an' takin' on like all possessed. Joe was kinder crouched up in the corner, a lookin' frightened, an' a starin' at his father's ef he war the Ol' Feller himself, which I hain't sayin' he war n't."

"But how does that make out he killed her?" demanded Barnaby.

The horse had come to a stand, and Blanket was forced to set him going again before he could go on with his story.

"Git up," he called, plying the whip; "'t ain't the fust time you've heered this story, an' enway your only business is to get the mail to the deepot in time. As I war sayin'," he resumed, "Mis' Ashgrave, she war dead, an' the boy war scarter 'n two boys 'd know how tu be, ef they hed n't seen so'thing; an' all he 'd say was, 'Mammy fell down stairs an' hurt herself.' They could n't get nothin' out o' him but that, an' it's all he 's ever sed to this blessed day. As for Reuben, he war jest that ternal wild he could n't tell nothin', an' he never got his sense agin up to his death two year ago this fall comin'. So'thin' happened that night up thar in thet pocket among them hills, an' ef 't war n't murder, I 'd like to know what in thunder it was."

"Had anybody ever seen him treat her badly?" demanded Barnaby.

"Not's I know on. Thar's more 'n our prayin' we du in private."

"He appeared to love her, did n't he?"

Blanket looked as if the question struck him as peculiarly silly.

"Most ginerally," he expounded his theory of life, "thar hain't nobody a woman wants more protectin' aginst than a man thet's in love with her."

"Well, I don't see a thing to prove that he killed her," asserted Barnaby.

"Thet hain't the way we look at it," said Blanket slowly. "Thar hain't nothin' to prove he did n't, an' until thar is, we take the benefit of the doubt. I guess ef that hain't law, it's human nater."

"And Ashgrave lives there all alone?" demanded Barnaby.

"Whar in timenation would he live?" exclaimed Blanket. "Most folks w'd rayther take the chances with a two year old bull in breedin'-time than hev him round, I guess; 'ceptin' with the boys an' gels, they would n't hesitate between him an' a full grown vig'rous Injin devil."

"So the boys and girls like him, do they?" asked Barnaby.

"Thet's the durndest cur'usest thing ye ever hearn tell on. Thar hain't a boy round here but w'd resk a lickin' any day fur the sake o' bein' with him a hour; an' as fur the gels — wall, gels don't get no sense anyways till they're old enough to be your gran'mother, even ef they do then!"

"Why don't he get married, instead of living there alone, like a ground-hog in a hole?"

"Cause the fathers an' mothers keep their darters tied to their ap'on strings when he's round. As fur the gels themselves, he c'd hev a Hiram up thar ef he'd marry all that w'd say 'yes' ef he axed 'em. Thet's what they call it when a feller hes a plural'ty or clean major'ty o' wives — I furget which. It's 'cause of a feller named Hiram Smith, over Westfud way, who

IN THE POTTER'S HOUSE

married two women simultinous, thet is at one an' the same time. I donno what he wanted to du it fur. I found one woman a clean major'ty an' some votes to spare."

"But you 're thinking of trying it again," laughed Barnaby.

"Yep; but I 've hed twenty year to get over the fust attack, and then I 'm pas' sixty, and a 'ter sixty a man 's a nateral-born darned fool 's fur 's women is consarned, which hain't sayin' they been't afore thet."

CHAPTER XI

BARNABY VISITS ASHGRAVE

THE STORY which Blanket scarcely more than outlined, at least raised the curtain a trifle and afforded Barnaby a glimpse of the real Ashgrave. He had asked regarding him, why? Because he was suspicious of him; because he disliked him. Yet lo, the moment he found that this was and had been the attitude of the community toward the fellow, he began to make excuses for him and to find in his very story proof of the blindness which had been the forerunner of injustice. The glimpse accorded had scarcely given him a single one of the details which this community knew as a familiar tale, but it enabled him to grasp at least the concept of cause and effect, to comprehend that there was a whole which these details concealed, and this concept, he found, drew him strangely to the man for whom he was already forming a strong dislike.

Was there, as an actual fact, this terrible thing there at the beginning of years, facing Ashgrave whenever he gave memory way? It was not the horror of it that found place in Barnaby's mind when he asked the question, but an intense awe over the loyalty of the man, who had guarded the secret during all these lonely years and never, for a moment, allowed it to show its hideous face to any human being. What courage had it demanded to live shut in the prison-house of his own knowledge, companioned by this grawsome thing, undaunted by loneliness, unbroken by the denial of human sympathy?

In spite of the brutish force in the man, he felt something in him greater and deeper than the shallow smallness of the lives about him, and this seemed the result of a refining and deepening sorrow. It was certainly not a wholly vacuous mind that had come, even though twisted, undwarfed from the years of lone companionship with the half crazed father, whom he, perhaps, knew to be a murderer, but to whom, none-the-less, he had never faltered in fidelity. Yet it was in this man's house that he had found and left Amanda Seagrave! That, after all, was the indictment he had against the man, and for exoneration therefrom, he found nothing in the story.

After supper, Barnaby strolled again across the hills and came to the spot from which he had first looked down on the Ashgrave farm, and the Seagrave, too, as for that matter. The latter lay at his feet under a sense of rest after toil that lent it an almost ideal charm. A half dozen lads were playing at rounders, Mrs. Seagrave and a neighbour were sitting in rocking-chairs under one of the great elms, and the farmer himself, with a neighbour and one of the hired men, was strolling leisurely about the barn-yards looking at the cattle and hogs. Amanda sat apart with a book, in which Barnaby felt her more deeply engaged than she ought to be.

At the other farm was Ashgrave and Ashgrave only. He was stretched on the grass in front of the house, smoking and companionless. Barnaby, drawn by the sudden interest the man had for him, no less than by compassion for his loneliness, turned here rather than to the Seagrave farm, and strolled down the hillside, which on his other visit he had covered by leaps.

Ashgrave's greeting was not uncordial, and yet there was an air about him as of one on his guard, who felt

suspicion of that which, to other men, was simple neighbourly courtesy.

"You smoke?" he asked.

"A cigar, now and then."

"I can't offer 'em, for I can't afford 'em." There was more of defiance in the tone and manner than in the words even, and Barnaby took measure of the man and his mood accordingly.

"You have your hay all safe?" Barnaby sensed a challenge in the other's brusqueness, and found something in his own mood that impelled to acceptance.

"For which I 'm indebted to you."

"Not a bit of it! I got more out of it by far than I gave."

"How?" The demand came sharp as a pistol shot, yet with a hint of suppression behind it.

"Oh, in the experience; the excitement of the struggle with the storm; the sense of conquering; in fact, the thing itself paid for itself twice over."

"Perhaps, as long as you had nothing to lose if you failed. It's another thing when you've got your all staked on the struggle."

"Oh, chut," Barnaby retorted, "a man who, whatever happens, will have body and brain left, can't say he's staked all."

"Body and brain! That means strength to work from sunup to sunset, and ability to scheme to keep your head above water. There's lots in it, is n't there?"

"Oh, you are n't quite fair," said Barnaby. "There's the sense of success."

"You just come back where you started," growled Ashgrave. "Your success is simply not failing. That hay crop was mine. I'd earned it. Still, I had to fight to keep it, and when I'd fought my damnedest, I

still had what was mine before, and not a thing more. That is n't success."

"What is it, then?"

"It 's heads, you win; tails, I lose, and you can't make anything else out of it."

Sharply, before Barnaby could frame an answer, Ashgrave changed the subject.

"Where 'd you met 'Mandy before?" he demanded.

"Miss Seagrave? I had n't met her before."

"But you knew her name."

"She passed us on the road, and Craig told me who she was."

"'Cause you asked him!" Ashgrave asserted.

"Yes, I asked him. One could n't well help it."

"Why not?" Again the demand was like a challenge, with a purpose he sought to cover half asserting itself in spite of him.

"I don't need to tell you why," Barnaby half laughed. "A fellow, when he sees a girl like that, can't help asking who she is. You are n't Craig."

"I hope to God not; but you 'd better been!"

"Thank you," said Barnaby. "I admire Craig, but not in the line of imitating him so far as a pretty woman is concerned."

"I 'spose you think God made pretty women especially for you?" Ashgrave demanded savagely.

"Oh no; but I think he made it a pleasure for me to look at them, and I intend to do it, every chance I get."

"Then you 'd better stayed where you belonged, and not come snooking round up here. Perhaps there 'd be more of 'em to see down there — wherever it is."

"May be there are," said Barnaby, "but I never happened to run across 'em. I never saw one anywhere who could hold a candle to Miss Seagrave."

"Don't you think we've talked about her almost enough?" Ashgrave demanded.

"Evidently too much for your comfort," answered Barnaby, with a dim perception that thus he could best give his companion the sting that his surliness deserved.

Ashgrave remained silent, under a supreme effort to restrain his temper, and it was not until Barnaby spoke again that he made any pretence of resuming conversation.

"What do you admire Craig for?" It was the second time Ashgrave had changed the conversation by a question as sharp and insistent as it was devoid of all pretence of convention.

This time Barnaby was rather left to flounder for an answer, which was the more embarrassing in that he had himself declared the admiration of which the other questioned. Finally he said:

"Because he sticks so determinately and unflinchingly to his sense of duty."

"So does old Seagrave — so does Buffington — the duty of making more than they spend, or spending less than they make."

"Oh, pshaw!" exclaimed Barnaby, "that's no parallel, and you know it as well as I. Craig stands absolutely alone, utterly regardless of himself ——"

"And everybody else," interrupted Ashgrave.

"Yes," admitted Barnaby, hesitatingly.

"It's like this," exclaimed Ashgrave, jumping to his feet and moving about uneasily as he talked. "Craig is a thing absolutely helpless. He has no will of his own, he don't even try to think for himself. He has looked life in the face, and he knows there's nothing to it. Whatever it is that controls him, it is n't himself, it's something that he can't control. He knows the fight

is useless and he stops struggling. You admire him for that?"

Barnaby was startled at evidence of the extent to which Ashgrave had read Craig's character, and yet quick to see that he had, at least in his analysis, missed what to himself seemed the central point. As he spoke, the sense that Ashgrave had really read the clergyman faded, and he began to give him credit for merely a superficial clearness of characterisation.

"He has surrendered, yes; but not to a power he could not resist, but to the power to which the loyalty of righteousness is due. It was not because he was powerless to make the fight, but because under his conception it is wrong — useless."

"His conception! He has no conception. Something has made him what he is; that is, utterly incapable of a conception other than that of submission, and he submits. There's no virtue in it, there's no merit. He can no more help himself than I can help desire; than I can avoid lusting after a woman. If there is virtue in his surrender, why is mine sin?"

"Because his is righteous and yours unrighteous."

"Bosh, bosh, bosh! Why is it right for him to follow his nature? Because it is right. Why is it wrong for me to follow my nature? Because it is wrong. That's the whole of your argument, which you bundle up in a lot of big words to make it look as if it meant something. Strip it bare, and it's the veriest, scrawniest weakling that a brain ever laboured to bring forth. We've got into the world somehow, and when we demand to know why we're here, one set of men say, 'to save your soul,' and everything that they think will do that is right, everything else is wrong. My body says 'to bring others into being, just as every other created thing does when

it is healthful and normal': and Craig and his kind yell, 'oh, that 's sin!' Why is it sin? Because it is n't right. There you have the whole argument!"

"But there must be something to guide us in our living and doing in this world," exclaimed Barnaby.

"Well? Why should it be any more what his nature dictates than what mine does?"

"If you won't let a fellow go back to authority," said Barnaby, "I see no answer excepting that the difference is whether one seeks the best for all or merely one's own gratification at the expense of others."

"That 's a better answer than you ever found at a theological school," asserted Ashgrave. "But when you 've turned and twisted and doubled and dodged, you 'll sneak back to some arbitrary power as the only thing that 's left you. We 've nothing to do with being here; we 've nothing to do with what we do while we are here. We 've simply got to stand and take it. The result of one line of action is heaven, that of another, hell. One man comes here foreordained to one line of action, and he goes to hell; another comes fitted for heaven, and he acts accordingly. So that hell may begin at once, we are given knowledge!"

"And knowledge makes it heaven already for the other fellow?"

"Not a bit of it! God and the world never give a blessing where a curse will answer!"

Barnaby was aghast at such a philosophy from such a source. Craig? Certainly. He was of the ascetic religious cast of mind which under other surroundings would have made him capable of the deeds of a Brébeuf, an Alva, or a St. Simeon Stylites; but here was a man, reckless in his living, passionate of nature, sensual to the verge of the bestial, and yet fulfilled with this sense

of the absolute dominance of a power not himself, that permeates every phase of life till it makes life and conduct merely an emanation of the creative and governing force. It was the doctrine of despair, sublimated to the absolute obliteration of self. Before he could shape his mind to comprehension, Ashgrave was speaking again, pacing up and down in front of him, where he lay on the grass, like a caged tiger before his bars.

"You're thinking of the difference between Craig and me. It's just here. He knows—and submits. I know—and kick. I know that resistance is the most senseless, useless act imaginable, and I plunge in all the same. I'm predestined for hell, and know it. He knows—and submits. He is predestined for heaven, and knows that also."

"Ah," said Barnaby, catching at the first flaw that invited, "there you are wrong. He does not even accept his own salvation as assured."

"What!" gasped Ashgrave.

"Just what I say. He believes that God may, after all, send him to hell finally. His attitude is that of having no concern in the matter. God has said, 'Do this,' and he does it, not to save his soul, but because God has commanded it. There is no merit in the act, because it is God's command, which he is bound to obey, and therefore for obeying it there is no reward. If he is saved, that will be an act of God, purely of grace, not of right, done out of the plentitude of God's mercy, and in no way affected by what Craig himself has or has not done in this world."

"Well," said Ashgrave, almost with a gasp as of lost breath, "I'll be damned!"

After a pause, he added in a tone rather of admiration than otherwise:

"He 's got more of the sense of things than I guessed."

"I tell you," exclaimed Barnaby hotly, "it 's all a ghastly lie! If that were the kind of world we 're living in, there 'd be no need of dying to go to hell. We 'd be there already."

"There is n't any need," said Ashgrave grimly.

CHAPTER XII

A NIGHT VISION

BARNABY was oppressed with a feeling of having had a glimpse into the deeper blacknesses, where thoughts find being that it is almost a sin to bring to birth. He was haunted, too, by a belief of some more intimate relations between Miss Seagrave and Ashgrave than any of which he had actual evidence, unless he was to find it in her taking shelter from the storm in the old farmhouse and remaining there when he left.

Yet, when he came to look at this fact with cool judgment, it seemed absolutely stripped of meaning. They had grown up as boy and girl together, they had always been close neighbours under the unconventional conditions of country life, and he had seen nothing which could not have found explanation in these two facts, had it not been for the individuality of the two actors in the drama, of which there stood, as facts of illumination, that impress of sorrow which the girl's face had had for him, and now this strain of pessimistic fatality in Ashgrave which his visit had revealed.

Ashgrave, when Barnaby left him, rose from the grass, where he had finally thrown himself, and stretched like a great animal that is testing its muscles. He had not asked Barnaby into the house, and he had made excuse to himself that the summer evening was far pleasanter out of doors. He wished now that he had given the invitation and left it to Barnaby to make the excuse, if he cared. Aside from a half-grown boy now and then,

and the companions of his periodical breaks with routine living, scarce a visitor sought him from year's end to year's end. Never before had a man of his own age, of experience and education to take with him a glance into the terrible deeps that opened at times as if to gulf him, come to him, and in this lone visit he had done what? Carried on with him a half-angry, half-contemptuous disputation that had shown the blackest side of his own nature, and, moreover, he had not even asked him to enter his house. He saw now that his very antagonism had been kindled by knowledge that here was something for which he hungered, and by anger at the weakness that made him long for what had been denied him.

For the once he realised how completely he lived alone and how so much of his life had centred about, and been shaped by, this fact of loneliness. So dominant had the note of self-isolation become as to cover him with an instinct of repulsion when another strove to break through his shell. The social faculty had ceased healthful action and demanded the stimulant of passion or appetite even to give it the semblance of life. Under the whip and spur of these, he plunged recklessly into excess, only to attain again his old quiescence with exhaustion and satiety.

Had it been winter, in the mood of the moment he would have taken himself to the fireside and one of the few volumes which his father had gathered, until they made a library larger than any other in the region. Perhaps he would have selected "Othello" or "Macbeth," volumes the very possession of which was a scandal; or Mather's "Magnalia," replete with fascination for a mind that had dwelt on the dark and fateful mysteries of being. But to-night, not books, but the silence of hills and woods called him to share their loneliness, and,

taking a blanket to wrap about him if it grew chill, he wandered off to the wooded hilltops near Seagrave's sugar-camp, to spend the night, as he had many another, under the stars.

How long he slept he could only guess, but the moon was already low in the west and he saw or fancied a flush in the east. Something had moved above or near him, as if a stir of wings touched the air, and had waked him as sound would have failed to do. He sat upright, but there was no noise abroad; even the wind had fallen silent. It was, nevertheless, as if he felt the wind, so subtle was the sense that he was not alone.

The trees stood as great masses of darkness, between which lay the lesser dark of the night itself. The pines and firs below him offered no breaks, but the boles of the maples were like monster pillars bearing aloft the dome of leaves. The moon dropped below the maple cones and stood at the end of a long aisle between great trunks, flooding the space with a white radiance that was more like a soft mist exhaled from the ground than light from above. In the very centre of this mist stood a figure in shape like a woman, yet seeming rather a mass of denser radiance than the form of an earthborn woman. She was motionless as the great black masses that towed about her.

A chill seized Ashgrave's great limbs and seemed to clutch at his heart. More often, as the "Magnalia" bears testimony, spirits work their will invisibly, but there is also abundant evidence that at times they take form, as in the case of William Morse of Newberry, and that "devil of a little stature, and of a tawny colour" at Salem. All hours of the day and night he had known the woods and hills about Padanaram, but never had he seen such sight as this, the white, misty radiance that

clothed the earth, and born from it this white density in the form of a woman, all enshrined in the motionless silence that encompassed them.

Under the trees the white light of the moon grew dimmer, but the first effect of this was to give firmer outline to the womanly form that had taken shape from the darkness. Then, in turn, it began to fade, until at last his aching eyes could no longer be persuaded to give it shape or outline.

The moon sank below the rim of the earth, the shadows crept up from the ground to meet the massed blackness of the tree-tops, until, save for dimming stars and that faint softness in the east, Ashgrave was in darkness. A faint rustle seemed to pass afar off, as if of wings or the trailing of light garments.

Sharply the numbness of awe which had held Ashgrave broke before the horror of acute fear. Physically, he was no man's coward, but this thing assailed him morally by the avenues of superstition. About him was the unseen; somewhere in the darkness, the unknown, and before these he crouched in terror, which knew no shame. There in the darkness he prayed, as he had never prayed before, appealing to God in the most abject of petitions for mere protection. A sickening horror of fear gripped him, till great beads of sweat broke out on his body and his legs refused to support him when he attempted to rise.

Suddenly there came a soft moaning through the trees, that grew on his affrighted senses till it was like the "mighty rushing wind" at Pentecost. He threw himself on the earth and called on the Lord to hide him. The moaning passed in the distance, and the stillness that followed was as if earth and air had been snatched away, leaving him alone among the eternal silences.

Like a hunted thing, he sprang to his feet and, heedless of bush or rock or tree, rushed downward to where his unseen farm lay in the valley, brushing as he went the night dew from the branches that struck against his face, and startling the sleeping birds and wild fowl from their perches.

At the first sound made by Ashgrave in his flight, a woman, who was standing under the arch of trees at the top of the hill, crouched in the shelter of a great trunk and held her breath in fear. Then as the sound receded, she gathered courage, from that fact as well as from the cover of darkness, and came slowly out into the open under the stars, the soft light of which gave her form against the blackness. She moved slowly to the verge of the hill and, turning her face toward the old farmhouse in the valley, waited. The noise of a man rushing down the hillside grew less and less insistent, steps sounded faintly on the door-yard turf, a door opened and a light blazed sharply forth.

The woman leaned against the trunk of a tree, her arms, crossed upon its rough bark, supporting her head, and burst into sobs, a perfect storm of tears and moanings. When the first tumult had passed, she crept slowly down the hill, crossed the yard and threw herself on the rough door-stone of the house. Here she lay as the light within grew dim and the white dawn stole up the east. Suddenly, at the distant crowing of a cock, she roused herself, made as if she would enter the house, then turned and fled toward the Seagrave farm.

CHAPTER XIII

AT THE POST OFFICE

THIS is the fourth day runnin' thar's ben more 'n one letter in this here bag," the postmaster declared, as he emptied the mail-pouch before waiting Padanaram.

"Fust time it's happened in the twelve year I've brung the mail," Blanket asserted, intent on his official share in the marvel.

"Tain't nuther," Singleton contradicted, his natural disposition towards disputation coming to aid his fear of belittling the importance of his office. "You're furgittin' the time when 'Mandy Seagrave war away to school."

"I hain't furgittin' nothin'," Blanket declared. "Did n't I bring her letter over ev'ry Friday night?"

"Thursday, you mean," corrected the postmaster.

"P'raps you know better 'n I du what I mean," Blanket replied, "but I sed 'Friday', an' Friday 't was."

"T was Thursday."

"An' tuk back the answer Monday mornings."

"Tuesday," asserted Singleton.

"Ef I remember right, I sed Monday, an' I guess I know, es long 's I hed to carry it. Yer mem'ry hain't what it us'ter be Peleg."

"Tain't, eh? Better look to hum!"

"Ye can't expect at your age, Peleg," Blanket began, only to court brusque interruption:

"Age! I ken remember enyway, when I's to school, hearin' folks say, 'thar goes ol' Tom Blanket'!"

"Sho!" exclaimed Tom. "I knew you 's tarnal long 'bout yer schoolin', but did n't knows 't long 's thet!"

"One 's fur the pahson," said Singleton, turning to the letters as a substitute for the retort he knew was expected; "one 's fur ol' man Bradshaw. It 's from Californy an 's got a ten cent stamp. It 's from thet boy o' his'n. Ef he 'd stayed nearer hum 't would n't a' cost his folks so much fur postage. T' other 's fur Francis Barnaby Esquire, an 's in a gal 's han'writin'."

"Jes' let them letters stay here a couple o' days, an' Peleg 'll tell you their in'ards," asserted Tom, who began to feel himself eclipsed in the interest aroused by the postmaster's gossip.

"I hain't never opened a letter thet did 'nt b'long tu me tu open in my life, you silicacious ol' scand'lerer, you!" the postmaster shouted.

"I hain't hearn nobody say es you hed," replied Tom. "Everybody s'posed ye read through th' outside when ye found out Miss Martin's aunt war dead over tu Milbank."

"An' when Bill Graves writ his father he wanted money to come hum with," called young Phil Buffington across the heads of the crowd which had drawn around the two principal disputants.

"Say, Bub, did yer father sen' you in tu pay me fur thet dress-pattern he gin Miss Buffin'ton two year come Thanksgivin'?" retorted Singleton.

The boy's sun-burnt face grew redder with the flush that overspread it, as he muttered something about a "pesky ol' skinflint." Blanket tried to come to his rescue.

"Warranted it to wear three year, did n't ye, Peleg, or th' money back? The deekin hain't takin' no chances."

"Thet letter," said Singleton, harking back to the original topic, "'s in a gal's handwritin', an' it's the second one this week."

"What's her name?" demanded Tom.

"You druv him over," answered Singleton. "Wouldn't he tell ye?"

"I guess I'll take ol' man Bradshaw's letter," said a young man, who had just bought some sugar and other groceries that could not be raised on the farm or entirely denied from the table. "He'll be over sometime 'fore Satturd'y, an' get it quicker 'n ef it stayed here."

"He hain't gin no order fur to gin his letters to nobody," said the postmaster cautiously; "an' it's agin officious regerlations to gin 'em to enybody but 'th owners."

"Gosh to hemlock!" exclaimed the young man. "I've ben takin' his letters ever sence Sam Bradshaw went away, an' I hain't hearn nothin' 'bout yer officious regerlations before! Cus what is 't? Hain't ye hed time to read it ye'self?"

Singleton put the three letters in his desk and turned the key with a snap.

"'Pears like," Blanket commented, "ef he opened his mouth he'd jest sizzle."

"You tormented, meddleous ol' fool!" Singleton shouted. "Ef the U. S. Guv'ment knew what a blamed ol' darned idjut druv its mail, it w'd come up here afore it did another 'tarnal thing an' pitch you off thet thar stage britches an' boots!"

"You don't say so," exclaimed Tom, winking to the delighted crowd. "I'm thet scart my har's standin' mos' on eend. I wonder what the U. S. Guv'ment'd du with my stage when they'd chucked me out."

"Drive it therselfs, you 'tarnal jackass!" Singleton shouted.

"The hull U. S. Guv'ment?" demanded Tom. "'Pears like they hev gin me a putty hefty job, ef 't would take the hull Guv'ment to carry it on. Might a' gin me better pay while I 's a' doin' it."

"You're a rampagious, durned ol' blatherskite," retorted Singleton, too intent on his quarrel to note the expression of satisfaction with which Tom had been glancing down the road. "You're a idjit, you're a — a —"

"Brother Singleton, is this the language of one brother in Christ to another?" The clergyman stood in the doorway. His words were but a faint reflex of the tone in which they were uttered and the expressive sternness of his features.

"He's a dodderin' ol' fool, pahson," Singleton began, amid the snickerings of the group; "an' Scripcher ses, 'Answer a fool 'cordin' to his folly.'"

"And the Scriptures say also," answered the clergyman sternly, "'those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart, and they defile the man.'"

"Tain't jest your line, Peleg," said Blanket with a grin, "to quote Scripcher to the pahson. Ye might jest as well try to larn Deekin Buffin't'n to drive a ox-team."

"And you, Blanket, to be a brawler and a babbler and a speaker of light speeches," continued the clergyman, wheeling around toward him.

"I guess my ol' hoss 's a gettin' tired o' standin' thar," muttered Tom, as he slid out among the guffaws of the loungers about the shop.

Craig received his letter and drew to one side to read it. One by one the men pretended some errand that had brought them to the village, and slunk away. Then Barnaby came in for his letter and stood a moment talk-

ing with the clergyman as Blanket, his horse cared for, came peering back for a renewal of his bickerings with Singleton, if by good luck the way was clear. Barnaby spied him, and interrupted his chat with Craig.

"Ah, there's Blanket," he exclaimed. "I must have a chat with him. He's the one original you've got in Padanaram."

"He's a light-minded, evil-tongued gossip," said the clergyman sharply, "and you encourage him in his frivolity. I'm sorry to see you affect the company of such fellows as he and Ashgrave."

"They're the two men, and the only two, here who have a thing outside the commonplace about them," replied Barnaby.

"They're a scandal to the community," said Craig, "if that's what you mean. They're a danger to the Master's cause."

"Poor Blanket!" exclaimed Barnaby, in spite of himself amused at the seriousness of the other.

"And if you can do nothing better than encourage them in their frivolity," continued the clergyman, "I say frankly you're doing harm here and I would have you go."

Barnaby grew serious with the affront offered him. He had come primarily to see this man, and beyond the first grasp of the hand had had no word of welcome from him. Now, he was plainly told to go, as unwelcome and a menace. He forgot that on his part, any thought for Craig had ceased to keep him at Padanaram.

"Whatever they may be," he said coldly, "you had been their pastor two years before I came."

The flush that mounted to Craig's cheek was not of anger as Barnaby for the instant suspected, but of sorrow and self-humiliation.

"You 're right," he said simply. "The rebuke where-with I would rebuke others belongs to me."

"Oh, pshaw, Craig," said Barnaby, sorry at heart for his idle retort; "I did n't mean it."

"You did mean it," interrupted Craig, "and even if you did n't, God did, and that is all that counts."

He turned away and walked up the street with his head bowed, like a man on whom a blow had fallen. Barnaby watched him, dumb with anger at himself for the unkind thing he had said. He had flung a taunt at this man, who felt the obligation of the trust imposed on him, as the representative of God and the Shepherd of his flock, as something greater than the issues of life or death. He, who had done nothing, who for the moment it seemed had attempted nothing, was capable of laying the lash of realised failure upon such a man! Never before had he felt the least stir of enthusiasm for Craig or his work; now, under the prick of remorse, it seemed as if he must go with bowed head and tell him of the wonder of awe which he felt for him.

"Ef the pahson was a leetle mite human, he 'd be consid'able of a man," Blanket announced, standing in the spot Craig had left suddenly.

"He 's altogether too good for you people," replied Barnaby sharply.

"I guess that's so," Blanket admitted, "but he furgits thar 's ben eighteen hundred year o' cussedness on the arth since Christ's time."

"Come," said Barnaby; "a man like that is entitled to some respect, aside from his being a clergyman."

"Gosh," exclaimed Blanket; "we gin him the respec'. Don't fool yerself thar. But when ye 've ben nigh him, you kinder feel 's ef you wanted to go out an' set in the sun till you 're thawed out. You kinder feel 's ef you

could warm up more to a man than war n't quite so near perfec'."

"Thunderation, yes," Ashgrave broke in on the conversation; "even Christ came eating and drinking, but this man's a John the Baptist."

"Ol' Deekin Buffin'n's never forgive him eatin' nothin' but johnny-cake to the Ord'nation Dinner," Blanket declared.

It was the first Barnaby had heard of this episode in the clergyman's career, and it struck him as peculiarly characteristic. At another time, he might have thought it characteristic as flaunting his pretensions to austerity at a most inopportune moment, but under the smart of his preceding act of injustice, he was ready to admit its inherent honesty of purpose.

"If he hain't a hypocrite," Ashgrave asserted, "he ought to take in his sign."

It seemed to Barnaby as if his own cruelty had been the cause of this misjudgment, and he hastened to condemn the assertion.

"If there ever was a man who felt the responsibilities of his office and tried to fulfil them, it's Craig," he said.

"What's he here for?" demanded Ashgrave. "To save our souls? He'd come nearer doin' it, if he did n't forget we'd got bodies!"

"Sometimes," mused Blanket, "they're a 'tarnal load to carry."

Ashgrave looked at him, half in amusement and half in contempt. Blanket disliked him, and he knew it; but that had no part in his answer.

"What do you know about bodies, with that dried up old carcass of yours?" he demanded bitterly.

"Wall," said Blanket, "it's got 'bout 's many in'ards an' out'ards fur pains an' rheumatiz an' sech like to tuck

'emselves away, es mos' bodies; an' ef thar 's eny good fur eny more, all I got to say is, I don't want 'em."

"Is it pulling you down to hell?" demanded Ashgrave fiercely. "Does it feel as if there was a devil inside it that drives you to drink, to cursings and to women? Is it a trap to catch you by the heels and throw you into the pit? Is it a dungeon of blackness from which proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, deceit, lasciviousness and blasphemy? Is it ——"

"No, 'tain't," interrupted Blanket; "an' ef that's what you're luggin' round with you an' callin' a body, the sooner you get rid of it, the better it'll be fur the town, an' you yerself can't be much wuss off."

"Worse off!" exclaimed Ashgrave. "By God, there are moments now when I can forget! You can shut your eyes and dull your senses, and give way to passion. May be you can't there. I'm not going to be in any hurry to find out."

"Pleasant sorter critter," said Blanket, watching Ashgrave as he moved off. "I've kinder thought sometimes he's sweet on 'Mandy Seagrave. Nice pleasant kinder husband he'd make her, would n't he?"

"Amanda Seagrave!" exclaimed Barnaby. "You don't mean there's anything between them — that way?"

"Wall, es I war sayin', I've kinder 'spicioned it at times, in my goin's up an' down the arth, which gives me time to cogitate an' ruminate; but thar 's one thing I kin tell you sartain."

"What's that?" demanded Barnaby eagerly.

"Thar would n't be much atween 'em that-a-way long, ef I war a clean-cut young feller sech es you be."

CHAPTER XIV

PRIESTLY ADMONITION

SIMEON CRAIG stood under the rose covered trellis, which was the red patch Barnaby had seen from the hill, talking to Ashgrave, who lay at full length on the grass, scarce turning his head to the speaker. In his two years as pastor of the flock at Padanaram, he had never before had to complain of lack of courtesy. Had Ashgrave merely walked away, he would have felt it less than the indifference which treated him and his speech as non-existent. None-the-less, he went on, making full use of a clergyman's privilege to say what would be suffered from none other.

"It 's not how others, but how God, judges you. You can't be a Christian and not be a good citizen. You can't be a good citizen, unless you 're a Christian! I 've spared you, and failed, I fear, in my duty. You 've been guilty of profanity. You 've let your terrible temper carry you beyond all decent limits. You have enticed younger boys here and led them into drunkenness. You 've lied; as a church member. You 've played the hypocrite. Unless rumour lies, you 've been guilty of unchastity ——"

Ashgrave turned suddenly, as if stung, and looked at the speaker. Then he turned again to his indifferent attitude, satisfied that there was no deeper meaning in this last charge than in the others. As Craig was about to speak again, however, Ashgrave swung himself around

with his elbow as a pivot, and faced him. At the movement, the clergyman waited to learn its meaning.

"Don't let me interrupt," drawled Ashgrave, a mocking devil making his face most repulsive. "It seems to amuse you and don't hurt me, as the hen said to the woman who was shying rocks at her."

"Is there no respect due me as your pastor?" demanded Craig sternly.

"I'm sure I don't know," said Ashgrave. "I never was good at riddles." He was keeping his temper, with a devilish perception that in so doing he was offending the clergyman more seriously than he could by any other course.

"I can call you before the Church," said the clergyman more sharply.

"Aye, and so can I; but will he come when you do call for him?" the boy answered derisively.

"One of your nasty play-books!" snapped Craig, who was losing his temper.

"Sure," responded Ashgrave; "but how in thunder do you recognise it? Been reading it, too, parson?"

Craig pulled himself together, sinking his personality in the sense of his high office and the magnitude of the responsibility that rested on him, and said, almost pleadingly.

"I came here for serious talk."

Ashgrave had thrown himself on his stomach, with his elbows on the ground and his head in his hands. He gazed up at the clergyman, looking the very picture of comfort.

"I'd a' thought you had enough of that on the Sabbath," he said. "I s'pose it gets to be a habit. Fire away and don't mind me, as the rabbit said to the small boy."

"Ashgrave," said the clergyman, stepping forward and speaking in a different tone than he had thus far used, a tone that was almost pleading under his sense of the awful peril of the man, and his own powerlessness, unaided, to save him; "I came wanting to help you; will you let me do it?"

The mocking devil that had lurked in the eyes of the younger man fled and a black cloud of anger shut down over his face; his teeth set themselves hard together, he threw his head up and the cords of his heavy neck stood out like rods of iron.

"Take your help to hell!" he screamed. "When I want it, I can ask for it!"

"Ashgrave," Craig interrupted, white in his anger, "I'll not permit such —"

"You won't, eh?" Ashgrave was on his feet now, and the two men, each almost a giant in his way, were facing one another, with scarce a yard between them. "You won't? Who's going to stop me? Not you!"

"Your own self-respect, I hope." The clergyman had again saved himself, and was holding down his anger.

"Mind your own business and attend to your own self-respect, God damn you!" shouted Ashgrave. Even as the words crossed his lips, the horror of them burst upon him and he felt as if the solid earth was giving way beneath his feet to precipitate him into a literal hell. The inherited traditions of a New England ancestry were realities, and the fear that came with a physical chill was as terrible as he had ever known. The bravado of anger fled him, and he stood facing the clergyman, cold, and with full knowledge measuring, in all this horrible conception of eternal ruin, the act that had leaped as a flame from the white heat of his unconquerable temper.

Craig took one step forward, thus bringing him almost on to the man.

"Apologise! Instantly!"

Ashgrave looked into the eyes that confronted him, without a tremor. He had gone too far to flinch now. It even struck him as a weakness that the man should demand an apology, as if he looked at this thing in its personal light, instead of asserting his priestly rights.

The interpreted insolence of the glance was spark to the powder of Craig's anger, and forgetting everything but the offence, his arm leaped back, his fist clenched and he struck squarely at Ashgrave's face. The act was the loosing of the terrible tension which held the younger man, who in the instinct of defence found the self that had been heard in the words that had stirred his horror. As the clergyman's arm darted forward, his own flew up and, with his tremendous right hand, he seized the other's wrist and stopped the blow. Powerful as was the clergyman, his muscles were weakened by his inactive life, while those of his opponent were like hardened steel. Still grasping the other's wrist, Ashgrave threw his weight and the strength of his muscles against him, while at the same time he struck his braced left leg with his knee, thus breaking his base. At this instant, releasing the wrist, he struck out with his right fist and the clergyman stretched his length upon the grass.

The joy of action surged through him; the terror of his sin ceased; he was a man facing the man who had wronged him. The thought swept through him that he had only to strike hard enough to kill; and he sprang upon Craig before he could rise, planted his knees upon his breast and, circling his neck with his two hands, began to press his thumbs together against his windpipe. The exultation of approaching intoxication seized him,

as the other's face blackened and the struggle of his hands to free himself from that terrible pressure became feebler and more purposeless. His own brain was burning with the joyousness of destruction, the consciousness of ability to kill.

Then he felt the sudden grasping of the collar of his shirt, an attempt to pull away his hands, and above him a voice that pierced his brain like a point of steel.

"Wait till you 've a wife to kill!"

He dropped his hands and looked at the girl in speechless wonder. She had not turned pale; she had made no effort to help Barnaby, who was still pulling at his collar. She stood there as calm as if it were an every day matter to see one man kill another. It seemed to him that under her calmness there was a touch of triumph that she meant him at least to read.

He rose slowly to his feet, giving to Barnaby only the pains of shaking off his hands. Then he looked down at the half-conscious man on the grass, whose tongue was lolling from his mouth, and whose breath came in short gasps. It seemed to him a despicable thing that a man should be so feeble and helpless. He turned to the girl.

"See what you can do for him. He 's a priest, and that 's next thing to a woman." Then he walked away, and left Barnaby and Miss Seagrave to undo the work he had done.

CHAPTER XV

GO AND SIN NO MORE

DO YOU wanter live tu be a ol' maid, like K'siah Singleton?" demanded Mrs. Seagrave tartly.

It was baking day and almost hot enough in the sun to make fire needless. The out-of-door oven was loaded with a variety of pies, cake and bread. A pile of split hickory by the oven door showed its clean-grained claim to preëminence among fire woods. Mother and daughter stood in the pleasant shade of the wide-branching elm for a moment of well earned rest. Mrs. Seagrave was a tall, gaunt woman, with a flat chest and high cheekbones, capable at forty-five of work that would tire a dozen ordinary women, and who persisted in believing that any woman who did not keep pace with her was loafing.

She had begun in deep surprise, in common with others, at finding herself the mother of this slim, graceful girl of the dreamy eyes and sweet voice; but she had now reached the point where she could say to a stranger, without the tremor of a doubt.

"At her age, you 'd a' thought I was her."

"Fellers hain't goin' to dance eternal at a girl's ap'on-strings," she pursued her first unanswered demand.

"I wish they 'd show some signs of quittin'," the girl answered.

"Take one on 'em an' t' others will," prescribed the mother, from the storehouse of experience.

"I 've got the say now," responded the girl; "he 'd have it then."

"Keep on dilly-dallyin', an' it'll be Hobson's chice," said the older woman spitefully.

"I don't have to marry."

"Mandy Seagrave will you talk sense? Hain't you a woman?"

There was no answer within the realm of experience to the clear implication of this demand, and Amanda took up in silence the task of cleaning the cookery implements. She and her mother had had their discussions weekly for more than two years, and she had always found them rather entertaining than otherwise, with their deep suggestion of the range of choice that was hers, and the silent flattery of the suggested devotion of unnamed lads. To-day she spoke under terror of the cataclysm that had left nothing on which she could plant her feet. For the first time she suggested the possibility of non-marriage. For her marriage was now possible with only one man in the world, to have named whom would have been to rouse a storm which she had no strength to endure.

"You're a'ter that feller Barnaby," her mother suddenly burst forth, after waiting a fair time for the girl to renew the discussion.

The very brutality of the accusation rent with violence a veil which she had unconsciously known was before her, and which she had not had courage to lift. Through the rent came the tremendousness of a truth that she had never suspected, yet now seemed always to have known. In the suddenness of the revelation, what had a moment before been the terror of the situation, became almost her single hold on the firm facts of life, since, whatever she had unconsciously hoped, this alone was possible. It gave her courage to play with the accusation as she would not otherwise have dared.

"Well: s'pose I am? where 's the harm?"

"Harm, 'Mandy Seagrave! You don't even know who he be!"

"I don't see that 's any worse than knowing so well just who all these others are."

"P'raps you think they hain't eny on 'em good 'nough fur you?" Mrs. Seagrave was actively at work again and spoke amid the clatter of pots and dishes.

"I know some of 'em ain't fit for a decent girl," retorted Amanda, aroused to a sudden desire for solace to her hidden anguish through spoken accusation of others. "Maybe you'd have me take Sol Green and bring up the baby he had by that girl at the Poor Farm."

"Shet up!" commanded the mother. "Thar's some things a gal should n't talk about."

"Things that are fit to be are fit to talk about," returned the girl doggedly. "You let him come here just as you do the others, and Tom and Harry know the story just as well as everybody else." If she must retreat, she had the instinct to do so under cover of her younger brothers.

"Boys know a heap o' things gals should n't," returned Mrs. Seagrave.

"And do a heap of things, I s'pose you'd say," Amanda interposed bitterly.

"Wall now, 'Mandy Seagrave,'" exclaimed the mother, her busy hands stopping in sheer surprise; "what be ye drivin' at? Ef ye can't talk 'bout decent things, ye 'd better shet up!"

"I did n't begin it," retorted the girl; "but I'm not going to stop, just 'cause folks think things can be done but must n't be talked about. S'pose it had been Sol Green's sister. Would you let her come here? Would you let our Tom marry her?"

"Land o' Goshen! Hain't ye got no sense? Would I let a trollop come here that hed a fatherless baby? Would I let Tom marry the critter? Be ye a fool?"

"I don't know but what I am," said the girl helplessly. "Sol Green asked me last month to marry him."

"He's got a mighty good farm," said the woman; "an' I heerd tell he'd ben buyin' a big lot of sheep an' payin' cash. You must n't be tu hard on young fellers, ef they du overstep sometimes — not ef they repent. Did ye think o' takin' him?"

"I had n't," said the girl "but there might be something in it." She knew her mother would not catch the meaning she threw into the words, but there was a sense of daring in uttering them that brought solace to the sharp pain that kept stabbing her since her mother's reference to Barnaby. Until that reference she had not even guessed what her sin meant.

"Yer father'd be mighty pleased," declared Mrs. Seagrave.

"And when Tom gets big enough, he might marry the girl up at the Poor Farm."

"Be ye gone clean starin' crazy?" demanded the mother. "Here I be a tryin' to du my duty by you as a mother, an' you a sayin' sech nasty things 'bout your brother. Ef you can't use your tongue no better 'n that, ye'd better keep your mouth shet, 'cept when you're chewin' your vittles!"

When the heavy work of the day was done, there came an hour or two before supper, when the girl could take her sewing or a rare book and steal away to herself and the soft dreams of maturing girlhood. Every nook and bower of the hills about the farm was consecrated to one such gentle dream that seemed to lay in wait for her in the velvet of the moss, the blue of the violets, the droop

of the columbine, the spirals of the princess pine. But the sweetest of all these dreams, the little white-decked chamber under the sloping roof had known. She had scant means and few models for its conversion into a maiden's home, but a woman's deft fingers and a maiden's pure heart found in simplicity the beauty of fitness, and a taste purer than her experience taught her its completeness. The ivory white of soft drapings, just lightened by the pink that gave tone to the cheap but pretty paper with which her own hands had covered the walls, gave an attractive setting that many a more pretentious chamber failed to offer.

And because this bower had known her most secret thoughts and deepest yearnings, she carried thither to-day the bit of sewing that was excuse for idleness. As uneventful as this day had seemed beside other days that were as epochs, she knew now that it stood above all others, save one, in the story of her life. These two — they were the days that must be eternal. When she had given herself to Ashgrave, it was to him to whom she believed love had already given her, and in spite of her maidenhood, this love seemed to cast over the sin some breath of sanctity. To-day, a word, and she awoke to know the bitterness of the dream with which she had deceived herself. She had lost the right to be loved, save by one man, and he one whom she never had loved; whom she never would love.

She sat with her hands idle in her lap, looking away to the summer hills from the far blue beyond which so many and many a day had come, a white-winged argosy of joy, bearing her its rich lading and taking in exchange the dreams and fancies of a pure heart that, outleaping the narrowness of rude life, had striven thus, at least, to touch the great heart of the world and be part of that

broader living which distance and ignorance robbed of all sordid details. She had known here the passionate hours when her soul cried aloud for companionship such as these dwarfed beings about her could not give; hours when it seemed, if this cry was not to be heeded, she had a right to blame God for giving her desires and tastes that must sink seedless into nothingness; but mostly she had looked on life with the healthful hopefulness of a pure heart, and had found it good.

Why had this man come to end all this? She had lived her life thus far and, but for him, she could have continued to live it. It was he who made it impossible. Ashgrave she had accepted in the full belief of love for him; and, in spite of all she knew of his selfishness, his brutality, his grossness, she could have endured — but for this. To marry him was to offend her father, to take upon herself the doubtful position he held in the community; but what would this have been, save for the other?

And now? Now that the other one had come, and come too late? Suppose she should dare to yield to love — if he should chance to love her — and marry him? She had known him barely three weeks, but she saw that there was scarce a day he did not devise some means of seeing her; and why else did he stay? Oh she had been blind; blind to what her mother had seen; to what others must have seen! If at last God had sent her this man to love her, when it was too late, would she have courage to refuse; would she have strength not to sin, where sin would be so easy and so safe?

This question, touching as it did the very root of her love for Barnaby, cleaving the dead body of her sin from the living purity of this sacred passion, filled her with fear. Even as she asked it, her whole being cried out

that, whatever might be the sin of marrying Barnaby now, the sin of killing this great love would be greater still. If Barnaby loved—and from the moment the veil was rent and she knew her own heart, she never doubted his—it would be with a love that meant to him all that it meant to her. Before the justice of God, they stood equal, but for this. Had she a right to bring death to his heart because she could not come to him in full purity?

Had she not the right, born of the equality of love, to judge herself by her answer to the question, what would she have him do were his the sin? She had answered to-day with sarcasm when the question had been pressed, but there was no love there to set against the sin. Her mother had given her the world's answer, with its separate code of morals for man and woman; but there had been no question of love there to set against cold-blooded judgment. Here, the great central fact was love, and there could be no answer that did not give it its full weight.

She knew no shame in thus weighing an answer to a love that had not yet spoken. She had been lifted above or sunk below that. It was too insignificant to ask which. She had got to know her answer when the question came, and sin would be no excuse for the greater sin that might be hers, if she came to the answer unprepared. It seemed to her as if in this certainty that, in one or the other way, she must sin against love, was given her the punishment that God had meant her to bear because of her fall from purity.

Reaching to the little shelf above her head, she took down the well-worn Bible that had been her companion from earliest girlhood and opened it mechanically. She was not consciously seeking guidance from its sacred

pages, but it was so much a part of her life, so interwoven with her days and nights, that it was the most natural thing to do in her momentous struggle for light. Her eyes fell on the printed page, and she read:

He said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.

It was never absent from the Hebrew or the New England consciousness that God talks directly with man and concerns Himself in his most personal and, seemingly, trivial thoughts and acts. How then should it be that at this crisis in the life of one of His children, when perhaps Eternity itself hung for her in her decision, He should not speak and speak through His inspired word? It was He who had put it into her mind to look in His word; it was He who had opened the Book and turned her eyes to the printed word. It was He who thus gave her specific directions as to her conduct in this matter. If the words had been equivocal; if, even, she had consciously sought to have direction, she might have questioned. But here, at the supreme crisis of her life, without conscious purpose, her hand had sought the Book and turned to words so clearly addressed to the actual circumstances of the crisis that to doubt would have been the unforgivable sin.

She came from her chamber as from a Holy of Holies. She had spoken face to face with God; her sin was forgiven her. The beauty of a great awe was in her heart and face. Her sin lost none of its hideousness to her, but the purity of a great love and great forgiveness enveloped her with the heavenly injunction, "Sin no more."

CHAPTER XVI

THE CHURCH MEETING

CRAIG forbade all mention, by Barnaby and Miss Seagrave, of the affair at Ashgrave's.

"It is my province, as pastor, to deal with it," he said. "There are two offenders against the Church, and both shall be punished."

Barnaby ventured to suggest an appeal to the law.

"The appeal will be to the Law," Craig answered; "but to the Law of God, not of man. 'Render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's and unto God the things which are God's.' The Church is complete within itself to deal with her offenders. The priest who is not judge is less than priest."

Nevertheless, rumour refused to be stripped of her rights, and whisperings of trouble between Ashgrave and the clergyman got abroad, the more tantalising in that they refused to take definite form. The sole foundation was that the clergyman was known to have visited Ashgrave, and to have appeared very much shaken and quite nervous on his return home that evening. Blanket, when appealed to, covered his ignorance by ridiculing the whole story, and it was felt that there could be little of interest in an affair of which Blanket had not even heard.

On the succeeding Sabbath, after the morning preaching, Craig asked the church members to remain. When the small non-professing part of the congregation had retired, he came down from the pulpit and, standing by

the communion table, offered a brief prayer for guidance and wisdom. Then he called on Deacon Buffington to act as moderator, and taking his place in the congregation said:

"I have failed in my duty as a clergyman and a Christian, in that I have allowed myself, under provocation, to attempt to strike a brother. As it is doubly incumbent on him who is set in authority to exercise that authority with moderation and wisdom, so is the offence doubly great when he becomes a brawler, dragging his high office into the mire and dirt. Of this fault I accuse myself. It is for the brethren to name the penalty."

With these words he left the meeting and went to the tiny study at the rear of the pulpit. The church members, dumb with surprise, looked into each other's faces, as if to ask what manner of thing was this that had fallen upon them. In the two years of Craig's pastorate, they had seen many things undreamed of before, at some of which they had begun by smiling, secretly. They were long past that. Whatever else they might think of their clergyman, all had come to believe in his sincerity. As a man, they knew him quiet and unassuming, living in humble poverty, and content where his humblest parishioner might have been rebellious. As a minister of God, he abated no tittle of the respect due him or the authority resting upon him. They knew that when he spoke, every word had been weighed, and they would offend if they treated it less seriously.

At the very first words spoken by Craig, Ashgrave felt that it would be a lighter punishment if the ground opened and swallowed him. He had never dreamed for a moment that he was to go unpunished; but in all the dreaming done in the lone dreariness of his home, he had never pictured a scene like this. He had come to

meeting that morning expecting to be arraigned and, perhaps, held for church trial, and he had come prepared to brazen the affair through, with a show of indifference and pride. Indeed, his very coming was to him the outward manifestation of the contempt with which he was prepared to meet accusation and accuser; and this was the actual fact!

There ran through the meeting a sense of the deeper meaning of the affair, elucidated as it was by the vague rumours that had spread during the week, and more than one inquiring, and potentially accusing, glance was turned toward Ashgrave. Under these he hardened. The manly shame which the scene was calculated to arouse was choked down, and by the time speaking began he was carrying his air of ignorance with the best of them.

"Kin eny brother or sister tell us the rights o' this thing?" asked the moderator, when the silence that followed the clergyman's withdrawal became oppressive.

Again glances sought Ashgrave, and again he met them with a heart steeled to indifference. Yet he knew that near him sat Amanda Seagrave, and that she was looking at him with a silent demand for him to act the manly part and make his confession. Would she, if he did not, tell the tale? It was a queer coil, he felt, that she should be the one of all others who could betray him. His affianced wife, his in the fellowship of their common sin, was the keeper of his secret! There was a grimness about it that, in the humour he was in, gave it an attraction for which he would have been at a loss to account in a saner mood.

Again the moderator appealed for enlightenment, adding:

"Sartain, the brother he tried to hit must know. Hain't he goin' to tell us?"

When it was apparent that no one was to speak, he asked Farmer Seagrave to "plead with us fur guidance to the throne of heavenly grace," and after the homely prayer rose and said:

"The pahson 's young and arnest, an' he 's a high idee o' his duty as a min'ster. We 've hed him in an' out amongst us now fur more 'n two year; we 've summered him and wintered him, an' we begin to know the kind of critter he is. He 's straight an' squar an' thar hain't no man amongst us kin say otherwise. But he 's a man. He 's got blood an' grit, as well as spirit an' faith, an' ef his dander has riz an' got the better o' him, I hain't goin' to think none the wuss o' him, an' I don't b'lieve thar 's anybody here what is. I hain't furgot that Christ druv the money-changers out o' the temple, an' I 'd a plaguy sight ruther hev a min'ster what remembers sometimes he 's a man than hev a brother what furgets he is, an' sets still an' ses nothin' at a time like this. Ef you think like me, you 'll call him back and tell him to go on the way he 's ben doin' the last two year, an' he 'll get thar all right in the eend, even ef he does meet some hubbles on the way."

A chorus of "amens" evidenced the accord of the meeting with the speaker, who, after waiting in vain for any expression of dissent, asked a brother to invite the clergyman to return. Craig came in and stood before the moderator's table, awaiting his sentence. The deacon reached up to the pulpit and lifting down the great Bible read from the sixth chapter of Paul's letter to the Galatians:

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

On the dreary practicability of this Yankee deacon

had shone this touch of Hebrew mysticism, leading him to the indirect communication of the church's judgment, where every one had expected the bluntness of inarticolousness or the garrulity of inexperience. The poetic strain in the act was wholly lost on the clergyman, whose imaginative powers demanded the accessories of a large stage on which to disport itself. The lack of imagination was, however, in part supplied by the faculty of reverence aroused by the appeal to the Scriptures, and he accepted the judgment to which possibly he would have taken exception if announced in ordinary language by the presiding deacon.

"Authority is in the voice of the Church," he said, "even when it speaks in mercy. If they who are set as teachers fail, their sin is the greater, because to them is given power that carries with it responsibility. Pray for me, brethren and sisters, that I may have strength to resist temptation and be worthy of the high calling wherewith God has called me to the work of His vineyard."

Resuming his place as pastor, he said:

"On the first Sabbath morning of next month, ye are called to eat of the Last Supper, in solemn commemoration of the night when, with his band of faithful disciples, the Son of Man ate the Passover. He also who was to betray him was present and dipped his hand with Him in the dish. Verily I say unto you that whoso, repenting not of the sin he has sinned, eateth this supper as one of the disciples, betrays again the Master and is guilty of His death. Therefore, if there be any here who is conscious of sin, I call upon him to make confession thereof or else take not upon himself the greater damnation that fell upon him who betrayed the innocent blood."

The impulse was strong upon Ashgrave to seize the opportunity which the clergyman thus offered him, and through confession attempt to retrace the steps of his descent. He had a sense of shame that another should have courage to own a wrong committed and submit himself to the judgment of the church, while he remained silent in his greater sin. Yet, when he attempted to speak, two things barred him; the one, knowledge of the hostility of the tribunal with which judgment rested; the other, consciousness of the blacker sin that rested on his soul and which he easily persuaded himself he had no right to confess, since confession was betrayal of another. So he left the meeting, still silent, and with a feeling of new resentment stirring in his heart toward the man who had placed him in the position of a coward and a sneak to his own consciousness.

CHAPTER XVII

THE SENTENCE OF SIN

THE shaft which Craig had shot reached a mark the very existence of which he did not dream. Although she knew, and she alone save Ashgrave and the clergyman, the purpose of the words, they seemed to Amanda Seagrave winged only for her soul. "Therefore, if there be any here who is conscious of sin, I call upon him to make confession thereof or else take not upon himself the greater damnation that fell upon him who betrayed the innocent blood!" In those words, she heard herself forbidden the sacred table, shut out from the communion, excommunicate of the church; and the mystical force of the sentence was the more potent because she knew that the speaker had no suspicion of its meaning to her soul. Before her passed the strange sequence of events that had led to the pronouncement of this terrible sentence, directed of man to one mark, and turned by God against herself. For Ashgrave and his sin of profanity, it was the voice of an earthly pastor; for her, it was the voice of God, speaking by the mouth of His servant who knew not himself the import of the message.

The intense nervous tension of the days since she read in her chamber the mystic message which brought her not merely forgiveness, but as well obliteration of her sin, had been for her a state of exaltation, from which she read into life meaning and beauty it had never possessed before. The vague and insatiable longings

of one who pauses on the threshold of womanhood and looks back with fondness and forward with hope, had turned to darkness and dread before the consciousness of unpardonable sin, only to be transmuted ~~into~~ the beatific vision of the miracle of forgiveness. Love, human and divine, compassed her to the washing away of sin. Accustomed from childhood to the symbolic language of the Hebrew writers, informed anew with the literal directness of the descendants of the Puritans, she found nothing in her experience for which her entire religious training did not prepare her. Forgiveness and the washing away of sin: to disbelieve their possibility would be to deny religion itself.

No influence, less mystical than that which wrought her exaltation, could have brought that doubt which, because it was doubt, was certainty. Divine purpose alone could have shaped the message, where the messenger had no hint of its esoteric purport. The sentence of excommunication had been spoken by lips that could not have interpreted the words. Every living force that had been sweeping on the current of joyance was suddenly stopped and turned back upon itself to be converted into the force of destruction. For the moment reason itself was staggered, and her one prayer was to hide herself and die.

Under this stress, the girl's protection was the absolute inability of her parents to reach her mood by analysis or interpretation. In a horse-trade, her father would have treated the surface indications as insignificant. In the attempt to comprehend a soul, the occult was non-existent. To her mother, despondency, fear that manifested itself by abnormal nervous irritation, suggested only the need of a purgative. Amanda's experience taught her that she was safe with her self-

revelation until she elected, or conscience forced, publicity.

She was, thus, as absolutely isolated, in the crisis into which she was suddenly drawn, as if she were the only created being. Yet in her isolation the dominant force was the tradition of a personal deity who guided and, at times, interfered in the most trivial details of life. It thus seemed to her no incongruous thing that the Master Power of the universe directly concerned itself in her acts, especially since she weighed them, not in their relation to the universe, but by their importance in her own experience.

The development of such a mood, departing from the intense practicability of the life about her, was action, the test of purpose in temporal affairs, the touchstone of genuineness in regeneration. Conversion was not merely abandonment of sin and turning to righteousness, but an actual physical process that attested itself through overt experience. Whatever a spiritual mood might become, it began in doing.

Her intense nervous excitement and distress of mind made, therefore, for action. Convicted of sin, the question of repentance as a mere spiritual state, of redemption through abandonment of sin and a growth in righteousness, found no lodgment in her mind. As, when she deemed herself forgiven, she saw forgiveness complete in its very inception, so now, when she knew herself condemned, punishment, as the wages of sin, became necessary and, necessarily, immediate. She realised that Barnaby had been possible only through the judgment, "neither do I condemn you"; that condemnation was his banishment.

She stole away from the house on Monday afternoon and took her way through the hills toward Ashgrave's

farm. As short a time as she had known Barnaby, it was startling how each spot, with which she was familiar from childhood, seemed never to have existed, save with relation to him. There was scarcely a rod of ground she traversed, scarcely a bower of trees, or a clump of bright-leaved laurel or massed brambles that did not plead for him. Her way was a Gethsemane to her soul; the broad way of death to her love.

Ashgrave was at work in his fields, stilling, by the anodyne of tremendous physical accomplishment, the mental and spiritual conflict that was dominant in brain and soul. With no single physical or spiritual function moderately developed, his suffering was as intense as his passions, and the scene in meeting the day before had set every chord vibrating with an agony that might as readily become repentance as brutality.

He was startled by the girl's approach, which he interpreted alone from the viewpoint of his own public abasement, of her self-sharing in which he had no conception. He left the field and, joining her at the gate, walked across the grass toward the house. On her part, she was too concentrated in her own spiritual mood to ask of his. Her purpose came with the rush of words that stayed for nothing.

"Our sin has made us one," she said, "and it is useless not to recognise it. I've come to live with you from now. I'm your wife; my place is here."

It was what he had urged and begged a hundred times, and she as many refused, bidding him wait. Now she threw it at his feet, as if the worthless gift had its old value! She had guiled him, perhaps even to the loss of his own soul, and now came to offer him, as worthless, that for which he had sinned. An insane anger seized him that she should think he could be trifled with

thus. The torment of his soul, the conviction of damnation, the smart of his public disgrace lashed him to passionate brutality.

"What do I want of you now?" he cried. "You refused to come to me when you could come as a girl should. You'd better wait till you're asked again, or take yourself to your Barnaby!"

To her exalted mood, the answer brought neither pain nor abatement of purpose. She walked on into the house and, standing within the doorway, repeated:

"I have come to stay."

For one moment he stood dumb with the greatness of his anger. Then he took her by the shoulder and pushed her out on to the doorstep. Behind her the key turned in the lock.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE RIGHTS OF LOVE

THROUGH the agony of surrender, there had awakened in her the marital instinct, which is surrender of personality. In spite of undisciplined mind, he was by far the stronger and exacted submission regardless of tearful resistance. Amanda crouched on the low door-stone, with no deeper conception of finality in her exclusion than has the wife who is thrust uncounted times beyond the threshold. It is the relationship, not the length of its continuance, that dominates.

To Ashgrave, for the moment, she was the incarnate punishment his sins had earned. He attempted no question of the justice of the sentence. His rage was alone torment that took measure of his pain. He knew, without seeing, the crouching figure on the door-stone, and it stung him with the impotence of repentance. He shouted through the barrier that separated them:

"You want to drag me down to hell, you she-devil! I 'll have none of you; I 'll have none of you!"

Then he bit himself in his rage that she still crouched there on the stone. He feared neither for her nor himself, lest anyone should come and, finding her there, so read the story of their sin. The world's knowledge, for the moment, counted nothing, as against the weight of his own. Before all, he comprehended that his sin actually lived, in spite of secrecy and silence. He was not even to suffer his own damnation as an individual finality.

The afternoon grew silent in its depth of sunshine, and

while Amanda yet lay with her head on the low doorstep, she seemed to look down upon herself from some terrible height, to read the sentence written in the crouching form. God had not meant for her thus easily to pass the torture of suspense. She had taken the matter into her own hands to determine, and her purpose was not God's. She had attempted to shun the cross laid upon her, to dictate the time of her punishment, and here was God's warning that she must abide his appointed time and way. She seemed as one standing deep in pity for herself stretched before herself, yet forbidden to soothe the anguish or even touch with the hand of mercy the forehead humbled to the dust. As she had raised her cross and borne it along the way to lay herself at Ashgrave's feet, now she raised it again and returned homeward to abide God's purpose.

At a turn in the way, where the path rose from a thicket of white birch, whose every leaf was adance in the breeze, she came suddenly on Barnaby, who raised a shout of greeting and pleasure:

"Oh, there you are! There is n't a spot I have n't searched, till I thought you'd been translated like Elijah of old."

That he could not know the cruelty of the blow deepened its sting.

"I've got to leave Padanaram," he continued, bursting with news, the weight of which cried for delivery. Then, for the first time, he saw her face and that wonder of sadness which had struck him at the first sight of her. The fact of his approaching departure dominated the moment, and he laid to that the pain of a soul in travail with death itself.

"May I think that you will miss me?" he asked eagerly, hastening to her side.

She looked at him with wide eyes, the eyes of a child who seeks to comprehend what in itself remains meaningless. Then she said slowly:

"No. I shall never miss anything any more."

Something of the incongruity of the answer seemed to work into her consciousness, and she returned his puzzled look with one of equal perplexity.

"Am I to regard that as base flattery?" he asked; and she, the unquenchable force of youth finding way, in spite of the armour of her grief, smiled back at him protest against an eternity of misery, bolstered though it was by two centuries of Puritan pessimism.

"I wonder if you can guess how much I hate to go?" he asked, when the smile had re-established relations. "I had hoped to stay so much longer."

"Did you expect to when you came?" she asked, with some revival of curiosity as to why he was there, which was much more forceful before her mother's revealing assertion than now.

"I don't know," he said. "I don't know just what I did expect or think in those days." He spoke as if of some far distant time rather than of days that were as yet barely a month old.

To her, too, it seemed as if those days were so far away that it was useless to speculate as to what one had then thought. She had lived so much in these four weeks, that all the effects of a long lapse of time were produced. It seemed as if there were few acquaintanceships that outdated his, and the interest which she felt in his leaving and which, manifestly, he expected her to feel, was robbed of its incongruousness.

"You know I'm coming back," he said.

This reminded her that she had not asked him why he went, and she repaired the omission. A letter from

his father, who was going to Europe on some business of government, called him.

"Perhaps he 'll want you to go with him," she suggested, with a sense of what it would mean if she could leave behind her all that she had ever known or seen and begin anew. It is one of the abatements of sin and misery that one can imagine it a matter of metes and bounds.

"Don't," he pleaded. "It 's what I 've been afraid of ever since I got his letter."

They came to a bank screened by a dense clump of kalmia, and turned naturally from the way to seat themselves on mossy rocks that were favourites of theirs.

"You do not think you have known me but a little while, do you?" he asked.

"No," she answered, harking back to the impression of the days before she knew him. "I seem to have known you a long, long time."

"Long enough," he asked joyously, tracing their similar impressions to similar causes: "to know that it is not too soon for me to love you for a lifetime?"

She grew pale as she felt the meaning of his words, and that overmastering power of expressing sadness returned to her face. He watched her in wonder whether that was the manner of girls when they receive a declaration of love.

"You cannot know — so soon," she gasped.

"So soon!" he repeated. "That was just what I was protesting. It 's not so soon. It 's so long; I seem to have known you always. I thought that was the way it seemed to you."

"I? I seem to have known you — ever since I began to live."

The lover in him thrilled with joy. Could one ask

more than that the loved one should have seemed to live only from the moment of knowing him?

"Is n't that long enough, then?" he demanded.

"Is it?" she asked, and then added "sometimes we die so quick."

"All the more reason," he cried, "why there are no days to waste! I love you. I 've had time enough to know that; and I could n't know it more, if I waited a hundred years. I 've got to have you, and for that I can wait — but I don't want to! You hear; I love you, love you, love you! I don't need any years or months or minutes to tell me that. I 've known it ever since I 've known anything. You do love me, don't you? You must! It can't be that you don't!"

She had drawn away from him frightened and trembling. She was afraid of herself, lest she should throw herself into his arms and own her love, doing him the wrong of such an act.

"Oh, you don't know," she faltered, "you could n't love me, if you knew."

"There's nothing, nothing that I could know that would stop my love."

No, things did not make or break love. That she knew, for, if they did, she could not love. That was not her meaning.

"If you knew," she began again, "you would n't want me for your wife."

"Yes, I would," he said. "I love you."

That answered all, and again she knew the answer true. She came back to her attempt again:

"You would n't have me for your wife, if you knew."

"Do you love me?" She was in his arms, and he was looking into her eyes, reading the truth which yet he would compel her lips to utter.

"Yes," Her head fell on his shoulder, hiding the shameful sorrow of her answer.

"Then, though hell gaped in the way, I 'd have you for my wife — and I will!" She felt his heart beating against her own and knew for an instant the shelter of his embrace. Then she drew herself back and attempted to push him away.

"Hell does stand in the way," she cried. "I 've no right to let you touch me."

He laughed, with the laugh that can defy tragedy.

"Nothing counts," he said, "so long as you love me. There can't be anything else. That is all."

Then he drew her to himself and began to tell her his plans. She interrupted him.

"Listen! I must tell you all."

"You have told me all," he answered. "You said you loved me."

His assertion of his rights swept away all sense of time and fitness. He had simply taken possession of her, and the questions of the past were a closed book. By her acknowledgment that she loved him, she had become his, and there was no further time to be wasted on that part of the matter. It was of their future — inseparable and indistinguishable — that he talked.

He would have to go in a few days now to see his father, of course. In some ways a father was more important than he had ever been before. A fellow could manage to knock about very comfortably, depending on himself. He had done it, and knew. But when it came to a wife, he 'd got to have something to depend on; and in his case that something must be a profession — the profession of the law. He made up his mind to that sometime ago, as he had told her; but there was then no reason for special hurry. Time meant

something now, something real to them both; and his father could help him, help him immeasurably. He should tell him, of course; tell him clearly and fully and — well, whatever resulted, he had her, and was not that enough for any man, reasonable or unreasonable? If worst came to worst, they could fight it out together, and the fellow who had her and could n't win, was a poorer specimen of a fellow than he thought himself.

So he rattled on, and she sat wondering, whether she could be the same girl who, within two hours, had offered herself to a man who professed to love her, only to be put roughly out of doors for doing it. She felt that she must wake and find that there had been a dream somewhere. At last she ventured on a timid question:

"Are n't you afraid to tell your father?"

As a matter of fact he was; yet as a matter of fact, he knew that he should tell him and tell him straight from the shoulder.

"Yes," he said, "I am. I was afraid to ask you to marry me; but I did it all the same."

The picture grew as he talked, and the levelling lines of the afternoon sun fell on them from the unclouded west. And why not? She was young; life was scarce begun; and she had yearned for love. She had always felt that there was a way for her in the great spaces; had reached out her hands for something that the staid loneliness of the old farmhouse and the grim mastery of Puritan Christianity could not give. It had been the great loneliness in her heart that was her isolation in the very midst of life; and here, across the spaces, out of the limitless deeps to which she had cried, a hand was reached, a voice came, and the hand was for her and the call was the call of her mate. Was she to remember — yes, but what? The darkness, the sin, the

loneliness; or the great cry that the heart of the maid had uttered and the heart of the boy had answered?

They walked homeward by the old path, and he, sobering a little as the hour of separation drew near, descended from the great mountain peak of joy on which his feet were set, and condescended to details as to their correspondence, his movements after leaving Padanaram, and the time of his return. He assured her that he was ready to meet her father at that moment, but she agreed with him that his father was first to be consulted, and that until that was done and their future on that line determined, it was best to say nothing here. In fact, when the time came to speak, it would be when they were ready to act, and action must follow at once on speech. Inasmuch as this jumped perfectly with his own impatience, Barnaby saw it as an inspiration of wisdom, and hailed it unconditionally.

So, before they came into the open path before the house, Barnaby took her in his arms and they exchanged the kiss of betrothal and farewell. It seemed to her that the purity of the love she had given him became a sacred baptism that washed away the impurity of her sin, and made her virgin again. She had asked nothing of him as to his past life; he had refused to hear aught from her. Was there not consecration in a great love, that made it atonement for far more than she had sinned, so that it became sin's great redemption?

But when she was in her chamber again and had no more about her the arms of her lover; when she remembered what she had been to one man, and the declaration of wifehood she had that very day, almost that very hour, made to him, it suddenly broke upon her that instead of this love washing clean her sin, that sin followed and stained this love, till it was of a piece with that she had

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given Ashgrave. She saw that the harlotry of her falsity with Barnaby was as much blacker than her sin with Ashgrave, as her love for the former was, in its essence, purer than that she had given the other.

CHAPTER XIX

FOR HE WAS IN TORMENT

THERE had never been a moment in the years of their association when Ashgrave's body so cried for possession of the girl, as when she lay on the door-stone, and he stood behind the door, closed by his own hand, and bade her go. The barrier that she, in token of debasement of her womanhood, threw down, he, in revolt against the fruitage of his sin, made double strong. His struggle was no less earnest because of his perception of the inevitableness of defeat. The very intensity of desire exalted the revolt of his will into the atmosphere of a higher morality, where he fought, trammelled by the treason of his body.

He foresaw the renewal of her struggle for admittance, and relied on that something in his nature that sprang armed against coercion, which had already given him strength to thrust her out, to keep him firm. He saw her at last the conqueror, through passion as her ally, and cursed his passion and her in the bitterness of defeat foretasted.

What he did not see was her surrender, as destruction of his own defence. So long as he had but to unbar the door and take her to his arms, he played with the possibility of possession and found it sweet. When she rose and walked away, desire took fire from denial, and will, thwarted of further resistance, became suddenly its accomplice.

He followed her into the path that ran from farm to

farm, along the spring waterway between the hills. He could not yet bring himself to the overt act of reversing the parts they had held and demanding her return to the old farmhouse, that stood, doubly lonesome and forsaken, in the summer sunshine; yet he knew that he would not let her return to her father's house. She had recognised his right of possession; she had laid everything at his feet, and while for the moment he had turned from the gift, ownership is in the very act of feigned indifference by which we seem to put aside that which is securely held, for the mere stir of jaded desire through mock repossession. Thus he read his bitter refusal of the afternoon. He saw now that he had never intended that she should hereafter have other home than his.

Then he heard Barnaby's voice! The hawk was stooping to the prey the eagle had coursed, and would try the task of snatching it from his very talons. He laughed; laughed at the temerity of the lesser pursuer, and at his consternation when he should appear and in mere presence assert ownership.

He laid himself at length along the rocks above the kalmia nook, and listened while they talked, allowing laughter first to dull the edge of his rage, and then maddened to loss of power for action under the sudden revelation of her love for Barnaby. So this was the meaning of her surrender; she had tried to win the other, and thinking she had failed came to him! Or had she feared herself; had she, in her love for Barnaby, felt a mad desire to save him from the disgrace that love would be to him by making it once for all impossible that he should ever prevail with her?

Whichever was the fact, it stood clear that she had simply aimed to use him, that her offer to surrender all

to him, her insistence that he accept her, was simply a trick for the punishment or protection of another! There was no doubt that she wanted Barnaby; that but for the sin that made her his, and would make her yielding to Barnaby adultery of the soul, she would now accept him. And while he read this as the last analysis of the drama in which he had been made to play a blind part, he saw the act and heard the words in which she did accept him!

Long after the two had gone, he lay on the rocks, looking up into the blue depths of the wondrous summer heavens. He was asking himself a question, and asking it with a wisdom that stilled for the moment the dominance of mad anger. It opened the door for that self examination which had never before been his mood until these wild devils of rage were gone. Why had he not leaped from the rocks between them and killed Barnaby and carried her to his home?

It surely had not been that he hesitated before that completion of the picture, which he had seen from the moment the thought entered his mind, clearly and in all its details. He had seen himself besieged in the farmhouse, while legal death beat with claim which he might postpone, but not deny. But he would have her; she, whether that delay was for hours only or for the few days to which it might be stretched, would be his indeed; and in the end there would be death for him and her. For never should another have her, when she became impossible to him. There should be the bridal of death, if the bridal of life was denied.

He had seen it all; it had not daunted him, and yet he had not acted. That was the strange fact which, for the moment surpassing in wonder all that he could have foreseen of himself, silenced the madness of rage.

And thus he lay, in self-communing, while the shadows grew long and cool, and until the stars came out one by one and the soft wonder of night lay its cooling hand on the earth fevered of day.

Were there no girls whence this Barnaby came, that he must needs come to steal Amanda? He set before himself the picture of his youth, so burdened with the terror of remembrance and his father's living death, that he seemed never to have known what youth was. He saw the battle he had waged with the hostility of his neighbours, who were ready to drive him from this little corner among the hills that was all the home he ever knew; he felt again the uplifting of the fierce pride that dictated that, come what would, he would hold against them, though it were with the grip of death alone. But it had been lonely, so lonely! And then she had come, and out of the barrenness of his days had grown the flower of love that he had watched and tended, dreaming of fruitage, until Barnaby came. Let him go back to the girls that might be his; the girls to whom Ashgrave made no claim! This girl was his; his, by every right, and no other man should possess her. In the end, he too might fail of possession, but at least he could kill her, if need was, to save her, even in the utter loss of her, to himself.

Kill her! It was Barnaby who deserved death and should have it, unless he gave over the pursuit of the only girl that the world held for Ashgrave. If men told the truth, there had been killing in the old farmhouse before this, and for far less cause! Was he the man to stand by and be robbed of all that made life tolerable? The answer was in the very question itself!

Ah, but the terrible emptiness of it all! There stood the old farmhouse in the midst of its desolate loneliness,

with no echo of feet on its rotting floors; no forms to gather in the fire blaze in the long, long evenings after the lonely toil was done and before the lonely sleep began. Had he asked so much of life, in asking companionship and the right to love something? If they had let her alone, she would have loved him; if this Barnaby had stayed away, he could have held her in spite of all the others. But Barnaby had come, and now there was just the old farmhouse, with its emptinesses and its memories.

When he took his way homeward, he believed that anger had passed from his heart, and he knew that somewhere, in some hidden place of being, righteousness was pleading the cause of wronged womanhood. It was the girl's trust in him that put her in his power that fateful day, and he had gained her, not through love that sanctifies a good woman's surrender, but by the brutishness of force that first destroys manhood. He saw how little the sin carried of punishment to him, as compared with its direful possibilities to her. She had striven, with the little feebleness that was left a woman by the hardness of the world, to save herself; and he — he, who had found her pure and left her defenceless — he had denied her even that protection that a brute gives its mate in the mere sense of possession!

What if she had thrown herself into the arms of the first man who offered her protection? Could he have expected anything else; would she not have been less than human if she had done otherwise? He threw himself, in the long shadows of the night, on the stone where she had lain in the broad sunshine of the afternoon, and tasted of the bitter cup of rejection and denial which he had made her drink so deep when, hunted to moral and social death by the terrors of her position, she turned to him in vain.

CHAPTER XX

BARNABY AND CRAIG

After supper Simeon Craig joined Barnaby where he was strolling in the warm twilight, reënjoying the afternoon memory painted. Excepting at the short meals, and sometimes at their morning plunge in the river, they had of late seen little of each other. Barnaby did not feel himself increasingly attracted toward the brand of Christian development of which Craig was the consistent exemplar, but did find himself attracted much in the direction of the farm among the hills, whither Craig's ways seldom held.

"So you 're going," was Craig's beginning. "I don't know why you ever came; but I do know you 've got nothing of good by coming, whatever your chances might have been."

Barnaby laughed over his different judgment of this matter, and made answer:

"If I had n't been here when you had that discussion with Ashgrave, there might have been a vacancy in the Padanaram pulpit."

Craig, with his fearful literalness, accepted this as a veritable measure, on Barnaby's part, of the result of his visit.

"I don't think," he returned; "that my life or death is of the slightest importance. It 's your eternal welfare that I was considering."

"Really," returned Barnaby, who for the life of him could not keep in control the joy that was beating in

warm blood through his veins; "that has n't troubled me in the slightest."

"If it had," said Craig, "I might have hoped something from your visit. As it is, I think it 's been useless."

"Well," replied Barnaby, touched by the sincerity of his companion; "it 's awfully good of you to care for my salvation —"

"I don't care for it, that is, not as to your individual soul. It 's of no more importance than any other soul, nor of any less."

"Thank you, all the same," laughed Barnaby. "Are n't there some here, to the manor born, that need saving?"

"But your own soul!" cried Craig. "To you it is all — to you it means everything!"

Barnaby took the length of the drive and return before he answered, in evidence of the thoughtfulness of his silence:

"No, I don't think I feel that. I think God put me into the world for something more than merely to save my soul."

"More!" exclaimed Craig. "What can there be more."

"Well, if you had blood in your body, instead of diluted water," retorted Barnaby, "you 'd know there 's love; to make a woman happy and be made happy by her —"

"Passion, you mean," interrupted Craig. "You share it with the cattle of the pasture."

"Come," said Barnaby sternly, "either we don't speak the same language, or its words have different meanings to us. In any event, it 's risky for us to continue to use it to each other."

"Who art thou, oh man, that repliest against God?

Reproof is from the Lord, and only the foolhardy is it who passes on and is punished."

Barnaby had already resumed his good humour, in token of his memory of the day.

"All right," he said, "but I'm not worrying just now over the hereafter. The here's good enough for me."

"Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee!"

Barnaby was far from able to free himself from the peculiar superstition which is the inheritance of the New Englander, and this declaration by Craig disturbed him more than he cared to acknowledge, even to himself. Such predictions, uttered with no more apparent basis than this, had been fulfilled in days past, and there was no reason why they might not be again. Nay, it was at just such times as these, when the soul has said to itself, "eat, drink and be merry," that the blow was wont to fall. He had read of them in innumerable Sunday-school books, and it stood to reason that so many writers would n't have told the same story, if there had been no foundation for it. He saw now, since the clergyman had spoken, that it was just what he had been fearing, ever since he realised that he had much in the way of happiness to lose.

"Is one to make no plans for the future, simply because he may die before they mature?" he demanded bitterly and, withal, uneasily.

"Lay up treasure where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal; for where your treasure is, there shall your heart be also. As to all else, take no thought for the morrow, for the morrow shall take thought for itself."

"Look here," said Barnaby, suddenly; "we're put into this world for something. We're given desires and

appetites; we find pleasure in one thing and pain in another; we — we — we learn to love a woman and want to do for her because we love her. Do you mean to tell me that all this, that God makes us want to do, is contrary to God and He 's going to damn us for it?"

"Be certain first that God does make you want to do a thing," said Craig sternly. "It 's as likely the devil as God. Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God."

"But how are you going to try them, if not by their fruits? If that which makes for love, which builds the home, makes you care for another because it is a greater joy for you than to care for yourself, makes you want to live decently and honestly, because it would pain another for you to do otherwise — if these things are not of God, then pray what is?"

"Alas, alas; the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked, and by covering passion with this pretence of love, telling you that you do these things for another, when you do them because of carnal passion and the desire for self-gratification —"

"Shut up!" exclaimed Barnaby, "you 're uttering blasphemy! God gave two commandments and both of them are love!"

He was ashamed of himself as soon as he had spoken, for after all the man was a clergyman and entitled to respect as the minister of God. He pushed the dirt and gravel a moment with his foot, and then looking up, with a manly air of regret said:

"Forgive me; I did not mean to speak like that."

"There is one from whom cometh forgiveness, even God," said Craig solemnly. "The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord; if, therefore, ye can speak evil of God, how much less will ye say of his servant?"

"But I'm not speaking evil of God," protested poor Barnaby. "He's given me love and a desire to be a good, clean man and to make myself worthy of love. Is that speaking evil of Him?"

"It is speaking evil to confound your passions and His commands, to accept a thing as good and from Him, because your unregenerate nature wishes it. Unless you do what you do with eye single to His glory, not because you wish it, but because He commands it, it makes no difference whether you do good or evil; nay, there are those who hold, and with apparent authority, that the more meritorious the work in itself, the greater will be your damnation, in that it can have no true source, but must spring from your vain glory and pride."

Barnaby turned upon the speaker.

"And it's on such a basis as this," he said in angry indignation; "that you expect to build character and attain heaven? I wish you joy of it! If it does n't prove a hell, you're made of something else than flesh and blood."

"Anathema-Maranatha!" cried the affrighted clergyman, who, if his inheritance had been other, would have sheltered himself under the Sign of the Cross.

Barnaby slipped away into the darkness of the highway and strode toward the Seagrave farm. It would be a rest to his wearied spirit even to see the house that sheltered his love. When he came in sight of it, standing huge and dark against the starlit splendour of the sky, a great joy stole over him, and he was foolish enough to think that here was a veritable message from the great heart of the universe, that, because of his love for this girl, he had drawn one step nearer than before to the source of love. So he came back to his simple chamber for a last night's rest, a night deeper and more meaningful

than any before, as the day itself had been fuller and more glorious.

As he came up the driveway, he looked up and saw a dim light burning in the clergyman's low-raftered room. He was sorry that he had let himself speak out his thoughts, for he knew it had pained Craig, and in the greatness of his own joy, he felt as an incongruous note the pain of another. He was almost of a mind to go up and try again to apologise; but he was held back by fear that they would simply renew the discussion and increase, rather than allay, the bitterness. So he contented himself with a wish — which Craig would have named a prayer — for the other's happiness, and stole away.

Craig came almost at the moment to look out on the night. His face was burning, his body seemed on fire, and a restless nervous irritability possessed him in mind and body. He had asked God to give him this soul and God had refused! He had no complaint to make to God; but he brought himself to the bar of judgment. If he had been a true follower of Jesus Christ; if he had buried self with Him and had known only Christ and Him crucified, he would have had but to ask and receive. He had asked and had come from the asking empty-handed!

"I brought him to thy disciples and they could not heal him," he said, gazing across the silent fields that God was refreshing with the dew of night. "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I suffer you! If ye had faith so much as a grain of mustard seed, nothing would be impossible unto you. I am come with hands empty unto the harvest, and yet I have ventured to rebuke those of sin, who, but for my folly and lack of faith, had seen salvation already!"

For long hours he stood, as at the altar of creation,

deep in silent prayer. He forgot weariness of body and spirit, while like Jacob at Peniel he wrestled until the breaking of the day. Yet he dared not demand a blessing, for he felt his sin greater than that of the Patriarch. When the morning came, and with it the demands of the day even to his quiet chamber, he knelt by his undisturbed bed and the bitterness of defeat was in his cry:

"Oh God, I have sinned! I have forgotten my high calling, and have looked upon the face of a woman to lust after her. It is for this that Thou hast smitten me. I rebuked another for sin, which I too have committed in Thy sight! I am no longer worthy to be called Thy son!"

CHAPTER XXI

THE ENCOUNTER AT THE FARM

BARNABY gave his trunk and carpet-bag into Blanket's care, with instructions to stop for him at the cross-roads that led to the Seagrave farm. Blanket's strong point was stopping, and Barnaby felt he could rely on him. Courtesy seemed to demand something on behalf of a man whom he had saved from committing murder, and he determined to make Ashgrave an early call before overtaking the stage at the cross-road. Incidentally, it meant a final glimpse of the Seagrave farmhouse, which he had not seen for eight hours.

Already the active life of the day had begun at the farm and, standing hidden among the trees, he saw Amanda pass in and out of the house. It seemed to him strange that life went on as before, though she supposed him already far away, and the sting of the concept was akin to the pain of loneliness which he felt would be his when he was really gone.

Then, when the hour warned him, he hastened over the hill and came upon Ashgrave, toiling alone, as his wont was. The isolation of the farm, its exclusion from all the activities about it, struck Barnaby more forcefully than ever before. The new day seemed to have no part in the farm, save to awaken it to its own loneliness. Ashgrave saw him moving down the hill, and paused in the doorway of the barn to await his coming, not with any show of pleasure, but rather as one who endures what cannot be avoided.

When Barnaby drew nearer, he saw, from the lowering heaviness of Ashgrave's face, that he was in ill-humour, and it suddenly struck him that he had had no particular call to put himself to so much trouble. Still he advanced and Ashgrave waited.

"I'm off for home," he said, when he was within speaking distance, "and am here to say 'good-bye.'"

Ashgrave looked at him and sneered.

"The longest way round 's the shortest way home for any dog."

Barnaby realised that the fellow was in a humour akin to that of the day when he attacked the clergyman, and knew himself in a scrape that might easily become disagreeable. Instinctively he understood the necessity for keeping his temper.

"It's such a magnificent morning," he began, but the other interrupted,

"The fewer words, the sooner mended. Keep on and you'll begin to lie pretty soon."

"What do you mean?" demanded Barnaby, stung out of his caution, in spite of himself.

"I mean that you came this way to see Amanda Seagrave, and you know it."

"I shan't account to you, if I did," retorted Barnaby, hotly.

"Don't be too certain of that," answered Ashgrave, with whom he was now face to face in the space of the doorway. "I may make you!"

"Make me!" exclaimed Barnaby. "I may make you keep a civil tongue in your head."

"Crow a little less loudly, my young cockerel," shouted Ashgrave; "or I'll wring your damned neck."

Barnaby knew that he had no power to contend with this young giant, and he understood fully the danger he

was encountering. He pocketed his pride and resentment, for the sake of bodily safety, and, resolved not to speak another word, turned on his heel in the direction of the cross-roads.

Ashgrave, however, to whom the sense of bodily fear was wanting, was simply confirmed in his ill-humour by what he regarded as contemptible cowardice, and before Barnaby had taken two steps, he seized him by the collar and swung him round, as if he were a mere child.

"I want you to let Amanda Seagrave alone!" he screamed. "Do you hear me?"

"Take your hand off my collar!" exclaimed Barnaby.

For answer, Ashgrave fixed his grip more firmly and shook him vigorously. As he shook him, he shot out from behind his clenched teeth.

"If I ever catch you looking at or speaking to Amanda Seagrave again, I'll shake your guts out of your miserable carcass. Do you hear me? Do you hear me?"

"If you 'll mind your own business," the words came jerked and broken from Barnaby's lips; but Ashgrave caught him up:

"It is my business and you 'll find it so to your cost, you miserable, sneaking, meddling parson! You need n't think I don't know what you 're after; I saw you two spooning together yesterday afternoon, and you came sneaking round last night."

"I 'm not answerable to you ——"

"You hain't? Don't you be too certain; but at any rate, she is. If she is n't my wife, 'tis n't because she ought n't to be ——"

"You infernal scoundrel!" Barnaby exclaimed, and, forgetting all but his anger, struck the other full in the mouth.

Ashgrave roared with pain. He lifted Barnaby fairly

from his feet, and flung him from him with the full force of his tremendous strength. Barnaby struck the ground first with his feet and made a desperate effort to save himself, but the force had been too great to overcome. He plunged forward, pitched heavily on to his head and, rolling over on to his back, lay motionless.

Without even a glance at the fallen man, Ashgrave washed the blood from his face, reentered the barn, finished his morning chores and went to the house for his breakfast. It might have seemed that the man and the incident had passed wholly from his mind and one could easily have imagined a start of surprise when, on leaving the house again, his eye fell on Barnaby's still motionless form. He walked over to where he lay and stood for a second looking down at him. The eyes were partially open, but through the slit the whites only showed. His breath was laboured and stirred a bloody foam about his lips. Ashgrave's glance had in it more of curiosity than interest.

Suddenly the years rolled back. He was a boy of a dozen years, and beside him was a tall, powerful man, gray, already, and yet very powerful. Angry words had passed between the man and his mother, and suddenly he seized her and flung her from him as he had just flung Barnaby. Then, through the night, was the wild rush of his feet. He woke the farmer again and started him for a doctor. Again he crouched in the corner of the old kitchen, wild-eyed and frightened, and before him his mother lay dead.

Pale, and with the perspiration standing in drops on his forehead, he stooped and laid his hand on the still man's heart. It was beating in a wild, irregular manner, but still beating. He lifted him in his arms, carried him to the house and put him, undressed, into his own bed.

CHAPTER XXII

A NEW COMER AT THE FARM

THE long summer day dragged on, hour by hour. Ashgrave put himself to his ordinary tasks, but at intervals of from half an hour to an hour, returned to look at the unconscious man. He racked his brain for any tangled shred of memory that might help to bring him to consciousness. Once or twice during the morning he started to bring a physician, but each time yielded to the impulse to keep the affair secret. As each hour passed, the increased danger of revealing the length of time he had left the man without help, added new argument against a physician.

Already, at the end of the cross-road, Blanket had sat crouched on his seat, with that unquenchable patience in perfect idleness which was one of his strong characteristics. But, as the sun climbed higher, he began to feel his responsibility to the United States government, as evidenced by the empty mail-bag; and at last, when he had measured the lapse of time by the position of the sun, he gathered up the lines and chirruped to the horse.

"So'thin' must be a keepin' on him," he soliloquised. "Wall, I can't wait no longer; and I hain't a goin' to kill no hoss, drivin' him fast, fur the sake of gettin' a feller out of Padynaram, I 'd a darned sight ruther 'd stay thar."

When night came, Ashgrave carried Barnaby up to a little room under the eaves, where he himself had slept during his father's lifetime. Few visitors came to the

farm, but if one came by chance, if Amanda should return, the ground-floor room was too public for concealment. In the upper chamber he could lock the door and feel fairly safe.

Thus the night and a day and another night passed, and Ashgrave reached the conclusion that the man would most likely die without recovering consciousness. His thoughts were busy, whatever his hands might be doing, devising means of disposing of the body. He dismissed as utterly impossible, come what might, the calling of a physician. The issue of life and death must fight itself out without assistance, other than he himself could give, and that was the same as nothing.

During Thursday night — the third of Barnaby's unconsciousness — he reached the determination to go the next day to the village. He had got to know whether Barnaby's disappearance was attracting notice or not. He had got to know what the people were saying, if it had. Ignorance might easily compromise his own safety.

Each morning when he went to the upper chamber, it was with the conviction that the man must already be dead, and this, instead of weakening with the days, grew stronger, and had never been so strong as on this Friday morning. The more, therefore, was he startled, on opening the door, to see Barnaby lying on the bed, with eyes open and, apparently, in normal condition. His heavy breathing had ceased, and the flush, almost as of congested blood, which had marked his face, was well-nigh gone.

Instead of Ashgrave experiencing any relief from what certified that he was not yet guilty of the man's death, he felt a new embarrassment. He had accustomed himself to the fact of his death; he had settled with himself

a safe method of disposing of the body; and here the man was alive and, apparently, returned to consciousness with all the new questions and new complications that must surely grow out of that fact. The man would make public what he had concealed. That would be a sure way to punish him. New discredit in the community would come; new complications with Amanda; even punishment through the law. One and all of these thoughts rushed through his brain in the second that followed his discovery. Then he stepped into the room and said, in a tone which he did not even attempt to modulate to express pleasure he did not feel and would not simulate:

"How are you?"

The question was instinctive rather than premeditated, the natural skirmish-line of the coming conflict.

The man on the bed looked toward him with the simplest of smiles, and answered in a low, musical voice:

"Pretty well."

Ashgrave started, as if doubtful of his own identity. There lay Barnaby before him, Barnaby as he had lain since the Tuesday before, save that his eyes were open and a dim light of intelligence played over his face; but the voice, the intonation, the force were as different from Barnaby as day from night. He almost shuddered as he forced himself to step to the bedside, nor did a closer sight remove the weirdness or the sense of confusion. The features were still the features of Barnaby, but there was something illusive about them, as if a veil was drawn between his eyes and them, and he was impressed with a difference. Then he began to study the details, and the sense of difference increased. Was this the mouth and chin that had grown so familiar? Was not the nose

different? Was the forehead quite the same? Had n't he been blind to think it was Barnaby at all?

With that question came the startling one, what had become of Barnaby; who was this changeling? To escape the horror of the demand that pressed on him, he asked:

"Are you hungry?"

Again the smile, the gentle raising of the eyes, the sweet, low voice:

"Yes, hungry."

The thing on the bed made no effort to feed itself, but compelled Ashgrave to play the rough nurse. When it was satisfied, it refused to eat further and thanked him with the gentle smile. Ashgrave took away the dishes and then returned to have it out with the strange intruder. On the bed lay Barnaby as he had lain since that fatal Tuesday morning.

CHAPTER XXIII

THOU HAST SAID

ON THIS golden Sabbath morning, Padanaram was buzzing with the strange story that Tom Blanket told at the post office the evening before, and was now repeating with the keen relish of a seasoned gossip. Barnaby's trunk and carpet-bag were still at the railway station, unclaimed. Barnaby himself had failed to appear at the cross-road where the stage awaited him. Barnaby himself had been seen by no one since he left the Widow Marlow's on Tuesday.

More than one who heard the tale, "pooh-poohed," and affirmed it a mare's nest. To this party the minister inclined, dismissing the tale as something not to be given a second thought belonging to the sacred day. Barnaby undoubtedly had gone another way and would send in his own good time for his luggage. To the mass of the community, however, the story opened too large an event in their simple lives for them not to have a sense of wrong against those who sought to rob it of its dimensions.

All Padanaram was at service, mainly because it was the custom, incidentally to learn the meaning of the warning all had felt in the clergyman's words of the previous Sunday. The current of their lives ran through channels so shallow and uneventful that the promise of the slightest refreshing came as a shadow in a barren land.

Ashgrave came, spurred by a restlessness that grew

with the deepening sense of horror and mystery which dwelt for him in the little chamber under the eaves. As much beyond his power as it seemed to tear himself from the farm, he dared not stay wholly away from the village and the message of warning it might have for him. It was the memory of Craig's words, which he alone, save the living dead man who was his guest, had rightly interpreted, that finally decided his halting purpose. It rung as a challenge to his awakened memory, and he decided upon the crazy project of daring the clergyman in his priestly office.

When he went to Barnaby's chamber that morning, the scene of Friday was re-enacted. For forty-eight hours had he been expecting it, and he held himself less under open surprise than before. In secret, however, it shook him even more than the first reviving had done. The period of unconsciousness had been briefer by a day than the former one, there was a better colour and a deeper flush of health in the strange face than when first he saw it, and it seemed to him that the difference in likeness to Barnaby was greater. In part, at least, this latter fact might be due to the softly curling beard and moustache which each day of the absence of the razor was thickening; but deeper than this, Ashgrave felt that there was a difference and that it was becoming more and more pronounced. He admitted to himself that, had he not known it was Barnaby who lay there, he would not have recognised him during the hour of his consciousness.

This impression he confirmed, when Barnaby reappeared in the unconscious being. The beard was still there, but so was Barnaby; and he was not the creature, soft-voiced and strange, who had been with him for an hour and had answered his offices of help with the eyes

of a grateful dog. It came to him startlingly and beyond the possibility of contradiction, that he had two men to deal with; the one, a corpse that he must hide at all costs from curious eyes; the other, a something, almost helpless, wholly gentle and lovingly grateful. It was the corpse he left in the bed in the locked room when he went, driven by resistless restlessness, to the service at Padanaram Church.

After the usual service, Craig came down from the pulpit and took his seat by the communion table, on which were the plates and urn, holding the bread and wine, and the glass goblets, covered with a white cloth. A hymn was sung, the scriptural account of the Last Supper read, and a brief prayer said. Then Craig uncovered the elements and gave the plates containing the bread to the deacons, who were to pass it to the members of the congregation, seated in their several places. As the deacons passed down the aisles, Craig repeated passages from the scriptures, still retaining his place at the end of the communion table.

There was a thrill of suppressed excitement in the congregation. Everyone felt that a crisis was impending, and each waited under sense of it such as would have fitted a larger issue in a larger community. As the deacon who bore the plate on the side of the church where Ashgrave sat approached his place, Craig had his eye fixed on the culprit, as questioning whether he would dare partake. Ashgrave sat, with head erect in conscious defiance, that made it clear that the issue had come. Craig's deep voice sounded through the church:

"Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered and said, Master is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said."

Ashgrave's hand, already extended to take of the bread, was checked, suspended in air, by something in

the clergyman's tone. With the utterance of the words, "Thou hast said," it seemed as if the strain under which the congregation rested suddenly broke. Women sobbed, men turned to each other with a gasp of breath, and Ashgrave, dropping his hand, seized his hat and rushed out of the church. Craig sat calm and implacable at the communion table, unmoved by the terrible judgment he had pronounced.

In a more sophisticated community, the suspicion would have arisen that the clergyman had planned with a view to the dramatic qualities of the scene. Whatever the New Englander had discarded, the final essential fact of priesthood was not of it. It still remained a living thing, as always where any shred of absolute religion dwells, that, when the priest spoke in his priestly essence, as distinct from his individuality, God spoke. In no other way could he speak so absolutely as a priest as in forbidding a church member the communion, that outward and visible token of membership in Christ. That when he so spoke, however he might choose his words, the guilty one would not recognise and yield to the authority, it no more entered Craig's mind to conceive than it entered the minds of his parishioners to question the act, upon which had been set the seal of the sinner's submission. When Ashgrave left the church, it was the final evidence of the personal interposition of God in enforcement of the sentence of His minister, and the act received the stamp of eternal righteousness, while the place became for the time the Holy of Holies, overshadowed with the very presence of the Lord of Hosts.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE CONFESSION

A LONE of all present, Amanda Seagrave failed to understand the meaning of the scene. For her it carried so great a personal note that she had no place for other concept. She had come to service in a state bordering on actual hysteria, impressed that God was about to demand of her public acknowledgment of her sin of unchastity, and to lay on her public punishment. To the method He would select, she gave no thought; but Paul went to Rome no more surely foreseeing his martyrdom than she went that bright Sabbath morning of the nineteenth century to Padanaram Church.

The experience of the preceding Sunday; her self-surrender to Ashgrave, and his brutal repulse; the sudden joy of Barnaby's declaration, and the revulsion that came with the conviction that she had doubly sinned; the vague rumours that had been circulated regarding Barnaby's disappearance — these were the steps by which she had come to this supreme hour, which was to blast her reputation, drive her from the circle of the elect, and bind her fate irrevocably with Ashgrave's.

Her mother who, with all her harsh New England utilitarianism and devotion to the gospel of the practical, was a woman still, felt the atmosphere that emanated from the girl, and without understanding it, knew her to be in a highly nervous state. She went so far, in token of her apprehension, as to suggest that Amanda remain at home and rest; but the girl had passed beyond the

point of evasion. She knew the road on which her feet were set, and she knew the command of God that she walk therein to the bitter end.

The clear manifestation of God's purpose was in the fact that the deacon reached her with the holy bread at the same instant that his companion offered the other plate to Ashgrave. Thus each hand went forward at the same instant, and the priestly words of excommunication fell upon the ear of each in the very act. Their hands fell together, as each drew back in horror from the profanation of the sacred elements.

The act of rushing from the church, which fulfilled the need of the moment aroused in Ashgrave by his recognition of the authoritative character of the clergyman's edict, would have been for Amanda Seagrave the most empty of futilities. Compared with the crass materiality of the concept of punishment laid upon him, her attitude was almost spiritual, with the spirituality of a soul whose atmosphere is purity and whose necessities are feminine. He could eat his heart away in inarticulate wretchedness — inarticulate, because masculine. Confession was inevitable to her, not for its own sake, but rather in obedience to the impulse of self-torture, which is not the denial of the flesh, but the exaltation of the spirit. Given another country or another age, and she would have wielded the lash upon her own body, remained for hours standing in bare feet on sharp gravel, or lain fasting and prostrate before the image of the Crucified One. The necessities of the spirit do not alter because time or customs change, and torture was as greatly her need as it has ever been that of the sinsick feminine soul, whether of man or woman.

With the offering of the wine and the singing of the final hymn, there came the pause, preceding the closing

prayer, which in tradition is the opportunity to unburden to brothers and sisters in Christ the sickness of the soul, but which always in Padanaram Church had brought in silence the solace of a duty well performed and acceptable unto God. Confession dealt only with generalities, and was not to be numbered among the working tools of a Christian, save as a means to gain the door of the church.

Slowly Amanda arose, stung with the sense of temerity under compulsion that was resistless in her state of nervous exaltation. She felt rather than saw the eyes of the congregation turning toward her, and knew when Craig raised his face to look, under the impulse of inquiry. In a voice low and pitiless, she made confession of her sin, striving, through the shame and horror of public exposure, for the office of confession addressed to God through the earthly representative of His authority. The unsatisfied hunger of the soul cried in her words, and for the bread of life the church gave her the stone of rejection and disgrace. Never did the office of forgiveness and redemption, inherent to the very being of the church, break down more utterly and pitifully than for this girl, pure-minded and yet sinful, who, laying bare her breast in the hope of healing, in a cry whose source was the weakness of humanity and its trust in God, severed the bonds that bound her to her kind and made herself an outcast and a pariah.

No heart that heard guessed the blind groping for forgiveness and restoration to the sense of God's favour which informed the strange scene. If, with a blurred sense that sin is the darkness of the soul and righteousness its light, Craig strove with the sense that there was that almost within his touch which, if he could but attain it would give meaning, eternal in its greatness, to the

emptiness of this sad vacuity, even he was turned back upon himself to become, at the critical moment and in the final crisis, the man and not the priest.

Without a word of personal greeting or sympathy, the girl left the church, happily blinded, through the yet dominant force of her spiritual excitation, to the drawing away of skirts and the coarse glances of disdain and super-righteousness bestowed by these brothers and sisters in Christ. Her father and mother, with bent heads and crimsoned faces, were already beside the old carryall when she came down the steps and crossed the green sward. On seeing her approach, Mrs. Seagrave stepped quickly into the vehicle, but when Amanda attempted to follow, turned on her and exclaimed:

"No you don't! Keep out of here, you trollop!"

Amanda drew back in startled fear. Clearly, whatever she had anticipated, this was without her guess. She lifted her set, drawn face — that face which had seemed to Barnaby to possess such an infinite power of expressing grief — and looked at her mother uncomprehendingly. It was the face of a child who, seeking solace, is met with repulse and cruelty; the eyes that plead, and only know that comfort is denied.

"Oh you kin look!" exclaimed the woman, sick with the wounding of her pride. "You 'llhev to take them wares so' where else 'n to me. I hain't taken in with that trumpery!"

"Mother, mother," pleaded Seagrave, who heard the snicker of men and boys and the virtuous sighing of the listening women.

"Don't mother me!" retorted Mrs. Seagrave. "She's a nice kinder darter you've giv'n me, hain't she? You ought tu be proud o' yer work."

Amanda turned, wounded to the death of her love

and speechless, and saw dimly, as through a mist, the cruel faces of the listening throng. Only an hour before every face was friendly and smiling. Now, with the knowledge of her sin and her need of human help, they were hostile and bitter. She turned again to her mother.

"What am I to do?"

"You've done an' to spare!" answered the woman. "I'm done with you. Don't you never dare darken my doors agin, as long as you live."

A murmur of approval ran through the crowd, touched with an understrain of sympathy for the outrage heaped upon this mother. Again Seagrave interposed, or attempted to interpose with his soft,

"Mother, mother."

"I know what you're a'ter," shouted the wife; "an' I won't hev none on it. She's no darter o' mine, an' I don't keer who knows it. Get in here, an' take me hum."

"But Amanda, mother?"

"Thet thing? I would n't lift a finger, ef she was dyin' afore my eyes."

Even the listeners gasped a little at this, with almost a touch of pity for the girl who stood there white and wild-eyed, paralysed by the horror that had fallen on her. Suddenly there sounded a voice of rebuke and indignation, and all eyes were turned toward the spot where the Reverend Simeon Craig stood beside the carriage.

"Woman, have you ceased to be human? Have you forgot that you are a sinner and need the mercy of God to save you from eternal fires?"

It was years since anyone had ventured to address to Mrs. Seagrave any such personal and direct rebuke of sin, and the surprise with which she received it had its counterpart in the apprehension expressed in the

husband's face. Craig laid his hand on Amanda's shoulder and faced about so as to take in the mass of people, without abating his personal directness in addressing the mother:

"This your daughter has sinned, but is it for you or me to measure that sin and say it is greater than is your sin of pride and want of charity, or mine of neglect of the sheep that have been confided to my care? If a lamb goes astray and falls into a pit, whose is the fault, the lamb's or that of the shepherd who was set to watch and, perhaps, slept at his post? Whose is the fault; the lamb's or he who left the pit unguarded? A grievous wrong has been done; but God, not we, shall say whether this child is guilty of the wrong, or you and I, woman; you, who as her mother should have watched her; I, who as her pastor, should have kept the wolf at bay."

Mrs. Seagrave was weeping, fain to hold the sympathy which she felt slipping from her.

"She's brought disgrace on a honest fam'ly," she sniffled. "Her father an' her brothers kin never hold up their heads agin."

"This our child is sick, and you sit by, not to give her medicine and nursing, but to mourn your own pain and trouble."

"There never was a harlot in our family afore," wailed the mother.

"Woman; if you use that word again regarding your daughter, I'll deny you the communion until you stand up before the whole congregation and confess your sin."

"But it's hard, pahson; it's hard," interposed Seagrave, who felt that as head of the family he must make himself heard.

"It is hard," answered Craig. "Sin and death are

always hard; yet He took them on Himself and died that we might live. Hear the words that he spoke:

Then came Peter to Him and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?

Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

A hush fell on the group. Not one who saw Craig's face as he stood with head thrown back, with body squared and commanding, but knew the ruler in the priest. The mother and father waited his word as the word of command.

"Amanda, my child," he said, "your sin has been great, and great will be your sorrow; but I, as your minister, say unto you, 'Go and sin no more,' and through me, God says 'Thy sin be forgiven thee.' Woman your sorrow is great; so also is the mercy of God. As you deal with this repentant child and sinner, so may God deal with you, when in the final day you stand before his Throne needing his grace. Amanda, get into the carriage and go home."

CHAPTER XXV

NEVER!

A SHGRAVE was in a very panic of fright when he rushed from the church. If the devil had appeared in person, he would have stood up and fought him boldly to a finish. That is what a man is in the world for, and it makes no difference that the chances are a thousand to one against him. But he had n't bargained to fight hand to hand with God, and he knew that that was what he was doing when, in spite of the minister's prohibition, he attempted to partake of the communion. He was caught in the act and could not plead ignorance.

There was nothing of resentment in his feeling toward Craig, notwithstanding his primary purpose at church to defy him. Craig had fought fair, after his kind, and that was all one could ask of a man. With equal reason one might feel resentment against a flash of lightning. He had learned, long ago, not to cry "baby." Nonetheless, he knew when he had enough, and he had it now, full measure, crammed down and running over. And when he should reach home, there would be — what? That inexplicable thing, or the dead man who was alive?

Half way across the second field, he heard his own name called from the direction of the cross-road. A man was standing on the low wall, gesticulating sharply and beckoning to him. He recognised Bill Holden from Belmont, and by the same token knew that Si Patterson

could not be far away. It was doubtful if the man lived who had seen one of these worthies without at once thinking of the other.

"Who ses 'tain't better tu be born lucky 'n rich?" Holden demanded, when Ashgrave was within speaking distance. "Si 'n me guessed the hull-cum-boodle was in the prayin' bisness, an' thar war n't a peg to hang a bit o' fun on, an' here the gol-durnest, on'arist cuss in Maine turns up, bound straight fur hell."

"Shut up!" exclaimed Ashgrave. "T is n't anything to be proud of."

"The hell it hain't!" retorted the other. "I hain't none o' your half-way fellers an' Si hain't nuther. When the Ol' Feller gets ready to cook me, he 'll find I 've arned the damnedest best cookin' his shebang kin give."

"Where 's Si?" asked Ashgrave, under an impulse to change the subject rather than follow out his line of self-exaltation.

"Here," responded a voice from the grass, and a shock of yellow hair was lifted for a moment. "Bill 's got so'shin' afoot thet means a night on it, an' I 'm layin' in a stock o' sleep." The yellow shock disappeared, and its owner left the others to pursue their explanation.

"Thar 's some bottled hell-fire, jest through from Canady, up to Plunket's, an' it 's wantin' som'un to Guzzle it. Sal Plunket an' the Jackson gals 'll be thar an' you know what thet means. We 'll make to-morrer mornin' of it afore we 're harf started."

Whiskey and girls! The vision danced before Ashgrave's eyes in all its tempting charm. If the church rejected him, the devil was n't as particular. At least he had good company to offer. But the devil always exacts the price, and does n't always accept such stuff as a fellow's soul. For some things he asks good money

of the realm, and, in Maine at least, that was scarcer at times than men's souls. A vision of the tax collector took shape before Ashgrave and gave him pause.

"It 's the price a darned galoot pays fur ownin' so'thin' thet don't do him no good," Holden asserted.

The yellow shock came up from the grass.

"Sufficient unto the day's the evil thereof. The tax-man hain't due fur a week. Bill's game 's wicked 'nuff to last harf thet time."

Ashgrave knew as certainly when he raised his first objection that he would yield, as he did at the final moment. He counted the luxury of a show of resistance, though it deceived not even himself. It at least offered the semblance of temptation to sharpen the prick of subsequent remorse. Yet at the last he was compelled to add to Holden's persuasive vulgarity his own concept of the sting of the ningled fire of passion and whiskey, and so goad himself to complete decision. Even so, the sudden burst of memory that brought Barnaby before him in vivid personality nearly upset the whole affair, and then plunged him into it the more deeply in search for forgetfulness.

It was late Monday afternoon, when he awoke to earthly cares at the speaking of the word "cows." Although still too drunk to stand steadily, he could see clearly the vision of three cows, unmilked since Sunday morning. Not a cent of his tax-money was left. It had all gone for whiskey and the girls, and in addition his cows were ruined. He braced himself on his feet and, with a maudlin curse at Holden, who tried to stop him, staggered out into the hot sunshine, five miles of which lay between him and the farm. In the shade of a clump of lilac bushes, he saw the yellow shock among the grass. He felt a strong temptation to seize a great rock, that

lay at hand, and crush it to a jelly. The head came up and the voice drawled:

"You get yer money's wuth. I've ben enjoyin' the afterclap for more 'n two hours."

"And I'll enjoy it for the next two years. My cows hain't been milked since yesterday morning," growled Ashgrave.

The yellow shock went down into the grass again, and there was a scream that resembled nothing else so much as the filing of a saw.

"What durned fools folks be to own things," came from Si Patterson's throat, in the intervals of his irritating laughter.

"I hain't got time to bury you, or I'd murder you, you damned rusty old screech-owl!" shouted Ashgrave as he braced himself for the five miles that lay between him and final knowledge of the extent of his losses.

In spite of the heat and his desolation, the open air and the brisk walk helped clear the fumes of alcohol from his brain, to fuller realisation of the frightful misfortune he had brought on himself. He could not recollect that he had eaten anything at the Plunket House. Between faintness and the vile stuff he had drunk in the name of whiskey, his stomach was in terrible revolt.

A mile before reaching home, he struck into the fields, and had barely crossed the first when he came upon Amanda, too suddenly to make avoidance possible. She gave a cry, mingled of surprise at seeing him and shock at his appearance.

"Where in the world have you been, Joe?" she demanded, and flushed under her paleness with a guess at the truth.

"The cows, 'Mandy; the cows!" He was too sick

to control his impulses, and for the moment his whole being centred in his misfortune.

"I milked 'em last night and this morning," she answered, rather as matter of information than from entering into his depth of interest.

He burst into tears and flung himself on the ground. In his sickness and weakness he was overwhelmed with the great revulsion.

"Thank God!" he sobbed. "I thought He'd gone back on me in everything."

She looked her surprise that anyone could be so overcome by the mere matter of cows, when there were in the world things that really concerned men and women. Then it seemed to her that he might not have heard of what took place after he left the meeting.

"I confessed," she said, looking straight ahead to the ring of hills, "to the meeting, what we have done."

He sat up and stared at her in blank amaze. He was but half sober as yet; his stomach was demanding attention, and the relief with regard to the cows had left his brain dazed and slow to act. He heard, but scarcely comprehended. She had nothing further to add, and he slowly developed the idea. At last it came to him in a flash, and he darted to her side and seized her by the arm:

"You?" he said. "You? Confessed?"

She nodded.

"That you had — sinned? With me?"

"Yes."

"My God! What did you do it for?"

"Because the minister said that to take communion without first confessing one's sin was to betray Christ again and suffer the greater damnation."

"But he meant me," declared Ashgrave. "He meant the time I choked him and swore at him."

"He meant sin." Her eyes were opened, for she had tasted the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and she read a meaning into the clergyman's words deeper than personal limitations. At the same time, she saw herself the embodiment of sin, and so accepted to herself the breadth of condemnation.

He stared at her dumbly and with vain effort to untangle relationship. At best he had little power to predicate from the abstract. It was only through a specific sin that he apprehended sin. He had listened for years to sermons against sin, to be overwhelmed only when the thunderbolt was hurled at the concrete sin of which he knew himself guilty. Amanda, on the contrary, through the consciousness of guilt, had applied to herself that which, as regards herself, was merely general. Betrayed by her conviction of sin, she had laid bare what she might still have concealed.

In his lame and impotent analysis, he laid hold of her presence here, and what she had told him of the cows, as the effect, traceable to her confession as cause. Of course her father had turned her from his house, and, equally of course, she had come to him again. He had her now, and on very different terms than when she came before and he turned her away. Could she by any chance have got into the house? His thoughts went with a hop, skip and jump and landed her plump against Barnaby. Had she discovered Barnaby, and if so, was it as Barnaby or something else?

"You 've done for yourself in this place," he said. He had some subtlety of approach, if he saw his issue well before him and it was not too deep.

She had reached the point where revolt was becoming

possible. She had expected nothing from her confession, excepting relief of conscience; but she had heard too often the legend of the joy over the one repentant sinner, not to be conscious of disappointment, in a dull, inarticulate way. His experimental remark chimed so clearly with this mood as to reveal to her its existence. She resented his supposedly acquiescent mood.

"By my confession of our sin?" she demanded.

"Oh yes, you 've lugged me in too," he complained.

"Who lugged me in?"

"You might as well say 't was all my fault, and be done with it," he retorted querulously.

"It 's gone beyond quarrelling as to whose fault it was," she said. "Everybody knows it, and everybody is so much better than Christ, that no one can forgive it."

"No, they 're afraid of themselves." It was his inspiration, and she caught the full effect. But he lost, thereby, the direct line along which he was working, and his whiskey-muddled brain refused to act at his dictation.

They walked in silence until they came in sight of the farm. Then she took up the practical again:

"You 'll find the milk set in the spring house, and the cream has been taken care of. I could n't get in the house. Mrs. Brown was over to do the washing and churning, but she could n't get in either."

Knowing, as he did, how unusual it was for anyone to lock up so carefully, he felt an implication of suspicion and resented it. Yet he took comfort to himself in knowledge that nothing untoward, as regarded Barnaby, had yet happened. Still, though she must have slept in the barn the night before, he could not expect her to continue to do so.

"Good-bye," she said, "I ought to be home."

"Home! I — I supposed —"

"Oh," she seemed actually to enjoy his confusion, "you supposed they had turned me out and I'd come to you? You'd turned me out first."

"It was to save you," he said, actually persuaded for the moment that unselfishness had prompted his brutality.

"We ought both to have known it was too late," she answered.

"But," he said, intent on the wonder her word "home" had suggested; "now it's known, we need n't care." He was feeling the loneliness of the house, with that thing of uncertainty in the locked upper chamber; and his heart was crying out for the companionship her discredited position seemed to make inevitable.

"They have n't turned me off," the girl said, and there was a sting of triumph in the way she said it. "Besides, if they had, I should n't come to you. I came then, because it seemed the way of expiation. When I made my public confession, that ceased to be necessary."

Clearly, he was unable to follow her line of argument. What he did know was that she was refusing him, and as cruelly as he had repulsed her but a week before, if not as brutally. His need of her stared him glaringly in the face and looked to him from the dumb house over which the shadows were stealing.

"But," he cried, "you'll marry me?"

"Never!" she said. "That is gone with the rest."

CHAPTER XXVI

BARNABY DISAPPEARS

A SHGRAVE entered his house weighted with a sense of depression that was almost fear. It was that weird hour, neither day nor night, when the shadows deepen, and a strange longing for companionship carries with it the impress of melancholy. Every corner of the darkening kitchen was instinct with mystery, and all that would have been familiar and commonplace by daylight, took to itself the strange and uncanny in the soft dimness. Silence lay on the house like a pall heavy with remembrance of every dead thing that had once given life to these rooms.

Conscience-stricken, he made his hasty way to the upper chamber where he had left Barnaby prisoner to that strange sleep, on the preceding day. The door stood partly open, the lock torn from the worm-eaten wood. There was no one in the room.

Ashgrave stood for a moment in dumb surprise, and then the possible consequences of the affair broke on him. Barnaby had escaped, not only from the room, but from the house. The absolute silence that greeted him when he entered convinced him. Already he might be in the village; already the story of his own brutality might be known. None-the-less, he hastened to the kitchen, and with a lighted candle began the search of the house. A raised window in the second room, with the print of feet on some soft earth beneath, confirmed his fear. He sought to follow the direction the fugitive had taken,

but the dry earth yielded no further marks, and after a little he returned to the house defeated. The need of careful accounting with the situation was more real to him than the ability to bring his aching brain in subjection to the task.

For Barnaby was actually gone. That was the conviction his search brought home to him. With it, that fear of discovery, which had haunted him since the accident, reasserted itself with commanding force. The isolate's instinct to reticence as to personal affairs was, in his case, reinforced by long years of concealment, during which he had earned safety through his oft-repeated assertion as to that tragic night in the old farmhouse. A simple story, told unvaryingly, had met every crisis and finally silenced all curiosity. It had its lesson for him, strong with warning now not to be ignored.

When he reentered the little bedroom, intent on removing every trace of its recent occupant, his eye was attracted by something on the floor that glittered in the candle-light, and proved to be Barnaby's gold watch. A feeling almost of despair seized him at sight of this object, indestructible by any means in his power, and which, in its novelty and attractiveness, almost repelled the instinct to destruction. He remembered taking it from Barnaby's pocket and laying it on the little light-stand, from which it had evidently been swept.

He smoothed the bedding, pushed into place the screws that held the lock, and replaced the room in the shabby disorder it formerly had. At last he was forced to take up the watch which he had left lying on the floor. The very act seemed of the nature of theft. He held that in his possession which belonged to another, and to which he had no shadow of claim. As he went through the house, removing every possible hint of Barnaby's

presence, the watch, lying against his heart, seemed insistent of notice. At last, unable to persuade himself to dispose of it where it would take permanent injury, he went to the mow and let it slide down between the side of the barn and the hay, where it would be undiscoverable, at least until the winter feeding had stripped the mows. Then he returned to the house and dragged himself to bed, sick from his debauch and wearied with anxiety.

Yet once there, he slept solidly and without dreams, for however he might at times show the reaction of intellect, he was predominantly animal, and weariness or sickness found its solvent in sleep. As with the animal, too, nature's reassertion of dominion was quick and effective, and he awoke in the morning with scarce an ache or pain to sharpen memory.

At the same time, he found himself under an unwonted indisposition to take up the routine work of the day, the more strange in one who, as a rule, found in extreme physical exertion the climax of reaction from his breaks with convention. He dallied about the barn, went in and out of the house with purposeless frequency, and at last took up the rainy day tasks of the farm, such as the mending of harnesses, the fitting of a new helve to the axe-head, or the scraping of the hickory bow for the ox-yoke.

He was sitting in the great door space of the barn at the latter work, when there came a shuffle of feet from the direction of the sugar grove, that half startled him to suspicion that Barnaby was returning. It was, however, one of the younger Buffington boys, who, as soon as he caught sight of Ashgrave, called out:

"Say, thar 's mor 'n a dozen fellers down to the store, an' they say one on 'em 's the sheriff. Thar 's goin' to be a durned of a time!"

"What do they want?" demanded Ashgrave, who had no need to be told.

"Why, you know that feller Barnaby; he hain't turned up nowhar, an' his trunk's at the deepot yet, an' they say he's ben killed — murdered — an' they be goin' to hunt fur him, an' somebody's goin' to get took up."

"It must be lively down to the store," said Ashgrave, beginning again to scrape at the ox-bow with his piece of broken window-glass, at the same time running over in his mind the precautions he had taken and the story he was to tell, if questioned.

"You bet! 'T was dead mean tohev to leave; but dad sent me fur ol' man Seagrave."

"What's wanted of him?" demanded Ashgrave, suspicious of any move that brought in Amanda's father.

"'Cause he's one of the s'lectmen, I s'pose. I come roun' this-a-way, purpose to tell you."

"Much obliged," said Ashgrave, "there's some Tallman Sweets in that barrel."

The boy went over and filled his pockets with the golden yellow fruit, but seemed still in no hurry to go. After a little, the look on Ashgrave's face convincing him that he had forgotten his presence, or at least purposed to ignore it, with a sharp cough as a preliminary he demanded:

"Hain't got no cider, hev ye?"

"Oh," exclaimed Ashgrave, almost with a start, "you here still? You know where the cider barrel is. Bring up a pitcherful, but don't drink too much, it's pretty hard for boys' drinking."

"Boys!" repeated the lad scornfully. "I'll bet 'tain't half's hard's some they got over to Bill Morris's, an' I drunk a pint o' thet."

"When 'd you get over your drunk?" Ashgrave demanded, but the boy scorned to reply to the insinuation. However, when he brought the pitcher, Ashgrave looked at him a little curiously and half jokingly gave him advice.

"If you want to tell your message straight, you 'd better get over to ol' man Seagrave's damned quick."

The boy raced away, laughing at the success of his trick in not filling the pitcher, and Ashgrave, putting aside the ox-bow, took a hoe and began hilling potatoes, at which work the selectmen, the sheriff, the county attorney and a detective from Augusta found him later in the morning. Mr. Barnaby, the elder, was with them, and his presence, of which he had not been warned by young Buffington, rather disconcerted Ashgrave, though not to an extent to prevent his putting on as bold a front as he had planned.

Questioned by the county attorney, he admitted without hesitation that Barnaby had come to say "good-bye" on the morning of his leaving Padanaram. He had come from the direction of the Seagrave farm, just as Ashgrave was going in to breakfast.

"How long did he stop?" asked the attorney.

"Only a minute or two," answered Ashgrave. "I did n't feel very cordial toward him and just said 'good-bye' and let him go on."

"Why did n't you feel 'cordial' — not 'very cordial'?" asked the attorney..

"He was shying up to Amanda Seagrave too much to suit me," answered Ashgrave boldly.

The attendant group of men and boys snickered at the mention of the girl's name, and her father's face turned scarlet with shame.

"T war n't eny of yer consarns ef he did," exclaimed

Selectman Seagrave sharply; "an' besides that, he did n't shy up to her, an' you know it! You hain't no business to lug my gal's name in!"

"I know he did," retorted Ashgrave, anger flushing his face; "and you encouraged him; you know you did."

"Certainly," interposed Mr. Barnaby, "my son could only have shown the courtesy due from a gentleman to a lady. He could n't have intended anything serious —"

"Wall, ef he did n't, he 'd a better stopped his philanderin' round her. We hain't used to hev a feller come sparkin' ef he don't mean nothin'."

"I 'm certain," Mr. Barnaby said with some coolness, "it 's not to be expected that my son had other purpose than a mere casual acquaintance in any attention he might pay to a young lady here."

"I 'd like tu know why not?" shouted Seagrave.

"Then he 'd better stayed away," yelled Ashgrave.

"Come, come, gentlemen," interrupted the attorney, "this is wide of the mark, and is wasting our time. If Mr. Ashgrave will answer our questions, it 'll be better all around."

"I 've answered your questions," said Ashgrave sullenly; and the detective looked as if he did not agree with the attorney.

"You shook hands with him and said 'good-bye'?" asked the attorney.

"No I did n't," retorted Ashgrave, whose anger blinded him to danger in admitting any extent of ill-feeling toward Barnaby. "I just said 'good-bye' and he went."

"Which way did he go?"

"Up the hill toward the sugar grove," Ashgrave answered, pointing in the direction indicated.

"What in the world would he go that way for?" Mr. Barnaby asked, turning and looking toward the hill.

"I did n't ask him," answered Ashgrave.

"You're a durned fool, ef you don't know," Seagrave interjected. "Thet's the way tu the cross-road thet leads tu the road to the junction, whar Blanket was to take him up."

The detective gave a glance at the hill and then turned and looked at Ashgrave, who was irritated at the look, and at the same time felt it something of a warning against allowing his temper way while he was under this man's scrutiny.

Other questions followed, in a great measure repetitions in other forms of those already asked, as is the way of lawyers. Ashgrave regained his ease and held to the simple tale he had determined on in advance. As they talked, the group with seeming purposelessness moved toward the house, which Ashgrave did not, however, ask them to enter. Finally the detective broke in with the sudden demand:

"When he got to the top of the hill, which way did he turn?"

"I don't know," Ashgrave answered, "I did n't wait for him to get there. I went in to breakfast."

"Was n't it rather late for a farmer to have breakfast?"

"Not when he has to cook it himself," said Ashgrave. "His stock has got to come first."

"Where did you eat your breakfast?" asked the detective, moving toward the kitchen door.

Again a spasm of anger swept over Ashgrave, and his hand twitched to strike the man; but he knew he was fighting his own battle now, as in the past he had fought his father's. The habit of dogged persistence in reitera-

tion held itself stronger than even his bitter rage, and he led the way into the kitchen.

"I eat my meals here," he said. "May be you 'd like to know where I sleep."

"Perhaps I may," replied the detective, who seemed to have taken the leading rôle out of the attorney's hands; "but I 'll take one thing at a time."

"You 'll be damned lucky if you do that," retorted Ashgrave, his face red with anger, and his heart hot almost to recklessness.

"Mr. Ashgrave," interposed the attorney, "this is unpleasant business for all of us, but I 'm sure you 'll see that it 's the duty of every citizen to give his aid in finding out what has become of Barnaby ——"

"I don't care a damn what 's become of him," shouted Ashgrave. "This is my farm and my house, and I 'll be let alone here, or I 'll know why!"

"Jest like the 'tarnal critter," declared Seagrave, "he 'll bust a blood-vessel some day in his mad tantrums, an' the Lord knows I wish he 'd done it afore."

Mr. Barnaby first turned pale and then flushed with anger. He said something in an aside to the county attorney, who answered:

"Oh, no. He would n't play the fool like that if he was trying to hide anything. He was evidently jealous of your son, and resents an intrusion on what he thinks his rights. I have n't a question he 's told us all he knows."

"You might have watched him going up the hill, if you were sitting at this table," the detective was urging.

"Yes; an' I might have followed him up the hill, only I did n't. I 've told you what happened. He came and said 'good-bye,' and I said 'good-bye' and thought 'good riddance.' Then he went off toward the

hill and the sugar camp, and I came in and got my breakfast. I did n't pay any more attention to him. I don't see what you want to pester me about if for."

"Because," replied the detective slowly, "we have n't yet found a soul who saw him alive after you say he left you."

Ashgrave looked the man squarely in the face, his anger rendering him reckless of consequences, and yet habit holding him firm to the line he had marked out. The others almost held their breath under what they felt to be a challenge that might well provoke physical assault. For an instant the result seemed to hang on even the motion of an eyelid, and then Ashgrave caught control of himself and answered in an almost conciliatory tone:

"Well, gentlemen, he was very much alive when he left here. You know a heap sight more 'n I do, if you've any reason for thinking he is n't alive still."

CHAPTER XXVII

ASHGRAVE AND HIS NEIGHBOURS

LIKE more conventional communities, Padanaram held doggedly to the right to think the worst of its own. Thus, when the fact of the complete disappearance of Barnaby was borne into its consciousness with the force of a conviction of sin under the preaching of a practised revivalist, it was ready for its victim. This was offered by the failure of any final trace of the missing man to carry him beyond the Ashgrave farm. The detective, whose every clue had failed, had simply to hide himself behind a show of inscrutable mystery, from which Padanaram shaped its fancies to forms more terrible than any probable truth.

To his townsmen, this unformulated accusation was far more an indictment against Ashgrave than was Amanda Seagrave's confession. It is the unusual sin that startles, whether to judgment or repentance. Moreover, it gave renewed force to the older story, and so deepened the sinister aspect in which the farm was already regarded. It came as something that lent force to the clergyman's denial of the communion to Ashgrave, and prepared the way for his final exclusion from fellowship in church and village.

Scornful as was the attitude Ashgrave held toward his fellows, the concept that he was at last in danger of being pushed over the brink and of becoming veritably an outcast and a stranger, brought him a sinking of the heart that he could not have fore-measured. He had

felt it first when, at the moment he resented Amanda's assumed attempt to force herself upon him, she declared that through the confession she was freed from all bonds to him, and marriage between them had ceased to be possible.

It was the secret, not the subject-matter thereof, that to her exalted state made the giving of herself to him so inevitable that even in marriage the bond would have been secondary. Now, when all the world knew, that special relationship of joint guardians of the secret had ceased, and nothing remained to them in common — not even common shame.

For, as bravely as she held herself with her mother, that the woman's fault was no more heinous than the man's, neither she nor Ashgrave was blinded to the fact that he would be held by the community to have erred venially, where she had sinned fatally, so that there was not left to them even the companionship of equal sin. In taking upon herself this weight of condemnation, she seemingly held herself absolved of all other consequences of their common sin, with the result that she stepped wholly out of his life, to the extent that he had scarcely seen her, and had actually never spoken with her since the Monday following her confession.

None-the-less, Ashgrave felt the menace of the past, which to her had merged itself in the penalty of confession, embodied in the future. The conception that expiation would be inexorably demanded, however powerless it might be to prevent his committing sin, was unescapable. Here or hereafter sin would demand its price, and in some way she would be connected with the demand. While he never abandoned wholly the hope of possessing her, she none the less assumed the aspect of an instrument of atonement, implacable and unescapable.

It was because he preserved a species of honesty with himself closely akin to bravado, that he never counted on the chance that a sin was to remain hidden. Had the certainty of hell been powerful to keep a man in the straight and narrow way, he would have been exemplary. A driver of bargains, when he dealt with his fellowmen, he never stooped to the folly of trafficking with God; and if he had commanded Amanda to concealment, it was in no hope of escaping punishment. Indeed, the certainty that God would deal with them in full measure was justification for concealment. His orthodoxy was of that sterling type that delivers to retribution the eternity of death and demands for itself some chance to make the most of life. The actual menace took, therefore, the phase of a species of injustice. The escape of Amanda through confession was to find completion in the ostracism, which of itself it could not cast upon him, that this assumption of crime unproved was sure to bring.

On his first visit to the store, he felt the change in attitude that the visit of Barnaby the elder, with the officials who had accompanied him, had wrought. It was the completion of that antagonism which had become long since the social atmosphere in which he moved. It had for him the effect of an act of human injustice, something beyond the mark of the account between himself and God, which account he was prepared to pay to the last farthing.

When he walked into Singleton's store, the loud talk of a half dozen men and boys ceased suddenly, and each made an awkward show of engrossment in some errand. There was not even a pretence on the part of half of them of returning his nod of greeting. One or two gave a half angry nod, as if protesting against his want of fairness in forcing public recognition from them. Among

the latter was young Phil Buffington, who, as far as he dared, had yielded to the attraction which Ashgrave's strong individuality had for the half-grown lads of the community, and had made the farm the haunt of his few idle hours.

Ashgrave walked over to the counter and made his demands with a brusqueness that commanded the trembling attention of Singleton, who was not unprepared to see the post office robbed and himself put in jeopardy of life and limb.

"Any news?" he demanded, while Singleton weighed coffee.

"Nothin' particaler," Singleton answered.

"Did n't know but somebody was dead, things seem so lively round here."

Buffington was sidling toward the door, in the hope of escaping unnoticed. Ashgrave paid no attention to him until he was at the very door, and then called:

"I say, Phil!"

"Yep?"

"Come up to-night. I've got a quart of whiskey — first class article."

"I don't drink whiskey," the boy answered, turning scarlet with the knowledge that at least three church members were listening, ready to report whatever passed to his father.

"Oh, given it up since that last drunk, eh?" Ashgrave sneered. "Well, come anyway. I've got some buttermilk."

A half laugh ran round the group as young Buffington slunk away. Ashgrave turned and fixed his look on Hezekiah Plunkett, an officious church member, whom he knew anxious to be the first to repeat the conversation to Deacon Buffington.

"He's most as light-headed as you, Hezekiah," he said in his pleasantest tone. "I'll never forget how drunk you got over to the depot last summer, when you wanted to hug old Mother Williams and she knocked you down."

"You're a dod-rotted liar," shrieked Plunkett, driven almost wild by this exposure, the fear of which had haunted him for months.

"Oh, I am, am I?" demanded Ashgrave, striding up to the trembling Plunkett, above whom he towered like a schoolmaster over a shrinking boy.

"You're mistaken," blubbered Plunkett. "I was jest sick."

"There hain't any doubt you were sick," said Ashgrave; "and you were sicker still when you rolled over in the mud. Say, did you ever tell that experience at prayer and conference meeting?"

"You must n't be a comin' here an' insultin' my customers," Singleton squeaked from his citadel behind the counter.

"Who's going to stop me?" Ashgrave demanded, taking a step toward Singleton, who seized the cheese knife and retreated to the shelter of his desk. "You or Hezekiah? You both look kinder bold!"

"This be the U. S. post office," Singleton shouted.

"Oh no, 't ain't! That little cubby-hole over there in the corner is the post office. This is just a shop where you sell cabbage-leaves for tobacco; sand for sugar; ground beans for coffee —"

"You're a liar, a durned on'ery liar!" shouted Singleton, jumping up and down in his anger.

"You and Hezekiah seem to agree for once," said Ashgrave. "You must have been buying corn of him by your selling measures."

"I hain't got but one set o' measures, an' you know it," yelled Singleton.

"Did n't say you had," replied Ashgrave. "Did n't say but you bought all your corn by your selling measures."

"You meant it eny way. You know you did, you meddlesome, sneakin' spy, you!"

"Come, Peleg," broke in Abijah Graves, "ye 'd jest better let thet subjec' alone, es the ol' woman sed o' the yeller-jacket. Jo's a gettin' tol'able near fac's, I tell ye."

"You 're a liar!" shouted Singleton.

"Both belong to the same church, don't ye?" Ashgrave asked.

"Yep; an' so du you, by gum!" Singleton answered.

"Yes; but I ain't in good standing," retorted Ashgrave.

"By gum, you won't be standin' at all, ef you get your comeupances," declared Singleton.

"Then I 'll be something like 'Bijah here, last March meetin', after he 'd drunk a lot of 'Squire Buffington's hard cider. 'Bijah, he lay down by the cross-roads, on his way home, and says he, 'This mornin' I was a Wig; to-night I ought to be a Dem'crat.' 'Cause why, dad?" Bill Graves asked him. "'Cause,' 'Bijah says, 'I hain't got no standin'!' Best thing he ever said."

"I 's only a playin' drunk, jest to tickle the fellers," explained 'Bijah.

"Wall, ef ye was, ye ought to go an' be a play actor," said Singleton.

"Oh, sho," remonstrated Ashgrave. "Don't forget how sweet and pleasant a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity. Next time they have the Lord's Supper, you ought to be ready to give each other the kiss of peace."

"Kiss thet dod-rotted old dried up carkis!" exclaimed Graves. "I'd ruther — I'd ruther —"

"Kiss a cow?" asked Ashgrave. "Same's you did over to Belmont to the big husking?"

"I did n't! I did n't! I did n't!" shouted Graves.

"You did! you did! you did!" yelled Singleton.

"You're a blitherin' idjit!" shouted Graves.

"You be a — a — a —," Singleton began, but before he could find his word, Ashgrave was at it again.

"Gosh! Here comes the parson!"

Singleton jumped to the other side of the counter and began vigorously doing nothing, while Graves rushed out to the horse-shed and unhitched his horse. The other customers had already slipped away, in fear of the moment when Ashgrave should turn his attention to them. Ashgrave gathered up his parcels and then made pretence of looking up the road again.

"Oh no, 't is n't the parson," he said, "it's Buffington's bullcalf — the brindle one, not Phil." He went out, put his bundles into his cart and drove to the blacksmith shop for a trace-chain he had left to be mended. There he found Phil Buffington and a half-dozen half-grown lads.

As soon as they saw him, they turned their backs and made a great show of talking and laughing, as a cover to ignoring him. But the whim that controlled him at Singleton's had already passed. He got his chain, mounted his cart and drove away without a word to any one.

Accustomed all his life to the rough banter of the countryside, in the past he had given and taken it without a touch of malice. Now he knew the different spirit in which he had spoken, and that it was born of the changed relation of the community toward himself, felt

none the less certainly because of his inability to place his finger on tangible proof. If he had been the aggressor as far as words went, back of that lay the offence that had provoked aggression, the injustice which had been measured to him.

He had not supposed that there were degrees of isolation, such that his former position could be made to seem desirable in comparison, yet as he drove from town, his sense of loneliness was far greater than he had ever before experienced. It was not alone that he was turning his back on Padanaram, resolved that hereafter all his dealings should be with Belmont. It was not even in the main this. It was a ravening, unreasoning hunger for companionship, which had been in part, at least, assuaged by the rough tolerance which Padanaram gave him, even though it was done grudgingly and in diminutive degree. All this he knew now was gone beyond recall, and trifling as it had been in possession, it loomed large under the sense of loss. For heretofore his sins had been only an aggravated phase of the sins of Padanaram itself; but now the sin of which he stood unreasonably accused had not alone closed Padanaram, it had left him as well cut off from new ties, a veritable outcast where before he had been simply a mark for hostility.

As he turned from the main road at the Seagrave farm, he came face to face with Seagrave himself, whom he had not seen since the sheriff's visit to his farm. The older man's first motion was as if he too would turn his back on him, as the others had done at Singleton's and the smithy. Then he took a quick step forward and beckoned Ashgrave to stop.

"Joe," he began, with a visible effort at repression that impressed even Ashgrave, dull as he was naturally

to the grades of finer feeling, "hain't thar so'thin' ye owe 'Mandy?'"

An answer so coarse that even the impulse to make it came as a shock, sprang to Ashgrave's lips, and then repentance, and perhaps a touch of his own loneliness, softened the words he actually spoke.

"I'm sorry for what's happened; but nobody'd known of it from me."

"No, I 'spose not," said Seagrave with a show of bitterness as well as impatience at missing a direct answer. "You'd 'a ben tu darned cunnin'."

"I'd thought too much of 'Mandy," replied Ashgrave, with the cold indifference of a man who has been betrayed into a kindly act only to find himself misinterpreted.

"You've showed it, hain't ye?"

"More'n you have. I'd have married her any time these last two years."

"Thet hain't the question. Will ye marry her now?"

"No!" The answer was quick and sharp as a pistol shot.

Seagrave had held his feelings well under control, as if in a dull, groping way he sought conciliation and through that reparation. But he had no strength to face this denial of his one hope. His face showed the deep stab Ashgrave's word had given him, and as the latter read, a devil of passion and revenge for the wrongs which he was feeling so keenly for the moment, tempted him to the devil's work. He leaned forward so that his face was but a few inches from Seagrave's.

"I was n't good enough for her before. She is n't good enough for me now!"

The very atrocity of brutishness that was in this reply startled Seagrave, well used as he was to the coarse

directness of his neighbours, who knew little of the niceties of tact, and made him powerless of retort in kind. Even Ashgrave shamed before the dignity that came into the other's face and straightened his form. Seagrave looked the younger man squarely in the face, and let his sorrow and shame, rather than his just anger, shape his reply.

"Joe, thet hain't decent."

"Decent!" shouted Ashgrave. "Decent! Who's been decent to me? Who's cared for decency when Joe Ashgrave was up? It's been a word and a kick, and generally the word's been the worst of the two."

"But she's a gal, Joe."

"And I was a boy! A boy carrying a load that would have broken half the men of Padanaram. Did anybody care? Did anybody give me a helping word? Did you ask me to your house? Did you come to mine? Did you say 'well-done,' when the boy did what most men could n't have done? No, you let me alone, when you could n't give me a shove down hill! I was lonesome: oh, God knows how lonesome I was! You turned your backs on me. I worked hard. You laughed when my crops failed and my cows went dry. I lived with an old father, broken, sick, half-crazy. You let your boys and girls make sport of him; you told lies about him. He went mad with the injustice you did him, and I found him one day, when I had been working for his bread and mine, dead by his own hand. Did one of you give me a word of comfort; did one of you come to lighten the load with the sight of a familiar face? No, you let strangers bury him. I tried to live decently with you, and you shut your doors in my face. I came to your meeting and wanted help to fight down the devils that tempted me, and you stood up and thanked God that

you were not like other men. Padanaram's made me what I am, and you 've helped; and now, by God, she and you 've got to take the result!"

As the torrent of words poured over the barrier that had held them in check for years, some sense of the wanton cruelty of all they recounted seemed to break upon Seagrave's dullness, and the shame of it bowed his head and clouded his face. When Ashgrave ceased speaking, the other raised no word in his own defence. His own shame, his own sorrow had lost its sting before this baring of the bitterness of a strong man driven to the devil by Christian cruelty. For the instant it was unselfish grief for Amanda that strove with his pity for Ashgrave.

"But, Joe," he said, laying his hand for the first time on Ashgrave's arm, "she hain't done it. She hain't the one fur you to cuss and punish."

Ashgrave leaned forward with the sneer of the devil that was prodding him, and had turned his bitterness to hate for all mankind, in his face, and said:

"You 're a deacon and, I 'spose, believe the Bible. It says the sins of the fathers shall be visited on the third and fourth generation. I hain't got there yet, but I 'm doing the best I can."

The older man's eyes flashed with the anger he had been holding down. At last the imp of Satan he had suspected in this man's heart was revealed, and he had as well plead to the stones of the road. He had come as a father asking justice; he believed he had come as a Christian and as a man without soil of selfishness and this was his answer! His wrath broke bounds, and it was the wrath of the narrow mind, that guessed not even of the dignity of rebuke. There was impotence, narrowness, futility in his shout:

"Cuss you, Joe Ashgrave; cuss you an' the day you was born! I'll go to Thomaston yet to see you swing fur killin' that thar Barnaby feller."

Ashgrave laughed with the revulsion of feeling that came from Seagrave's outbreak. It was a laugh deeply bitterer than his anger had been.

"Well," he answered, "one thing's certain; 't won't make 'Mandy a widow, even if I do swing."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE CONFERENCE

SIMEON CRAIG understood that the supreme earthly danger for Amanda Seagrave was the public confession of that which, privately known, might easily have been her sufficient protection. As long as the stain could be hidden from public gaze, concealment was the supreme motive. With the instinct of concealment thwarted, the field was clear for revenge and rage, impotent, but as well blind. Not the sin, but the publicity given the sin, was the central shaping force of Amanda's future relations with her people, with which he had to account.

As to these earthly dangers or those relations, they were, in themselves, less than matters of indifference to the clergyman. That the girl was disgraced in the eyes of the community; that she should be discarded by her parents and driven from home, even; that she should live or die in suffering and want, were, in themselves and for themselves, absolutely without importance or interest. It was only as these things affected the girl's chances of salvation or damnation that he cared for them or pretended to care for them.

Independent of the girl herself, however, the matter presented itself to him as in essence a test of the Christian sincerity of the church at Padanaram, and in this light he looked upon it as divinely ordained and specially directed, to be distinguished from God's test of Abraham in degree, rather than character. Confession unto the

brethren and repentance were ordained of Christ, and against him only who sinned and repented not was pronounced the sentence, "He shall be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." Equally sure was the mandate, "If he repent, forgive him;" yea, though it be seven times in a day, "If he turn again to thee, saying I repent, thou shalt forgive him." Yet here he faced the fact that, because of repentance, because she had followed the Master's mandate and confessed to the brethren, they would cast her off, and in this her father and mother would be foremost!

Indeed, though they still gave her shelter, more obedient to him speaking the words of Christ than to Christ himself, she remained with them, but not of them. At home, her mother scarce spoke to her, and if her father, with the gentleness that strength accords often to weakness, was kinder, he showed his kindness in a shame-faced, apologetic manner, that marked with new clearness the line which separated her from the household and the church. She came to and from service, ungreeted; shunned by the more considerate and insulted by others. In brief, it was the letter of obedience alone that he was able to obtain from the church, and even this was so yielded as to mark the more clearly the utter absence of the informing spirit.

He was stung to the very quick by this breakdown of that brotherhood in Christ for which the church had ever stood to him. It must be what it professed to be, or it was nothing. The command which was a command on the plains of Palestine in the first century was a command in Padanaram in the nineteenth, or Christianity was a myth and its avowed principles a delusion.

He took the matter up, vigorously and authoritatively, with Mrs. Seagrave, whom he was prompt to recognise

as the impelling home force in the treatment of Amanda. He came from the encounter, worried and discouraged, impressed with the startling discovery that, in its final essence, Christianity was not to her a system of conduct, regulated by rules laid down by Christ himself, and touching every phase of being, but a theory of salvation which, once accepted, marked no really distinctive attitude toward the affairs of practical life. Instead, indeed, it set apart from life all those certain phenomena especially concerned with the eventual securing of heaven by avoidance of hell.

Charity, forgiveness, repentance took no new meaning from Christ's words, and had for such a Christian no special obligation. Two and a half centuries of New England ethics outweighed nineteen centuries of the Christian Church, and Craig found the woman absolutely uncompromising in visiting upon the sinner her abhorrence of the sin.

"I 've my duty as a respectable woman, aginst whom thar 's ben never a word o' scandal, to consider, an' I can't let flesh an' blood come atween me an' my good name," she asserted.

"You 've got your duty as a Christian to consider," the clergyman responded sternly, "and nothing else counts."

"It 's the fust time I ever heerd harlotry named Christianity," she retorted.

"You have the word of Christ: 'If he say, "I repent," thou shalt forgive him.' "

"An' you hev the Bible for it, 'A good name is ruther to be chosen than great riches.' "

"Yet He did not hesitate to eat with publicans and sinners and to treat Mary Magdalene as a friend."

With the same unbending literalness with which he

insisted upon Amanda's right to forgiveness and full fellowship in the Church, he laid upon her the injunction to make no attempt to escape her punishment. To his attitude toward the matter, her suffering and her mother's wounded pride were of equal indifference; but it seemed to him that in the maintenance of the family tie was the one chance to save the girl from slipping into the sin of continual unchastity. For this reason and the unmistakable mandate laid upon Christians in the matter of forgiveness, he was resolved that she should not be driven from home.

The fathers and mothers of the village, however, ranged themselves against the clergyman and with Mrs. Seagrave. They had sons and daughters, and their faith in the efficacy of repentance, if it in any way resembled a grain of mustard seed, resembled one that had escaped germination. So it happened that one Sunday after service, the clergyman was invited to meet his deacons, and the members of his church who were heads of families, in a conference that was to deal with the question of Amanda Seagrave's continuance in the community.

"We've heerd," said Deacon Buffington, who had been delegated to present the general view of the matter, "thet you're a insistin' thet the gal shall be treated the same's if this thing had n't a happened."

"She has repented and confessed her fault," the clergyman answered, with that peculiar tone of finality that was his when speaking as a priest. "There's no choice left in such a case. The Bible is positive in saying what shall be done. She is forgiven. 'Thou shalt forgive.' The command is as positive as, 'Thou shalt do no murder.' It's God who is insisting, not I."

"She hain't fit to live with decent folks," the deacon answered.

"Under Moses's law she'd a' ben stoned to death." The postmaster was intent to show he knew the Scriptures as well as the clergyman.

Craig wheeled on him and something more than godly anger kindled in his eye.

"Let the man who is without sin cast the first stone."

"Come, come pahson," interposed old man Graves, "don't be tu hard on Peleg; his accounts may hev got twisted 'ithout his fault."

"I hain't axed you nor nobody else tu defend me," retorted the offended Peleg. "I hain't no need."

"You hain't, hain't you?" demanded Graves. "We hed to pay twenty-five dollars an' ten cents, did n't we, to save yu yer place?"

"The Gov'ment made a mistake in their figgers," declared the postmaster.

"An' would a' kerried it so fur you would n't a' got out yet ——"

"Stop!" exclaimed Craig. "Are you backbiters and heathens; or are you brothers in Christ? Is it to please your selfrighteous pride you have met in conference, or to ask honestly your duty as Christians and to follow it when you know it?"

"T ain't none of our duty as Christians to countenance harlotry," grumbled Deacon Buffington..

"But it is your duty as a Christian to forgive, or rather, to respect God's forgiveness of the brother or sister who repents." The clergyman knew his strength to lie in this most simple of propositions and in steadfastly repeating it.

"Wall," declared Farmer Warren, "we 've got to think more, I guess, of decent livin' an' our homes, than

of a gal that did n't care 'nough for herself to keep herself decent. It don't stand to reason we've got tu forget what's right an' what's wrong, jest fur fear o' hurtin' the feelin's of a gal like what she is."

"I don't care whether her feelings are hurt or not," the clergyman said quickly and sharply. "I don't care for her feelings; I don't care for mine. We're put into the world for something more important than feelings. We're put here to save our souls, and help others save theirs. We're here to do what Christ bids us do. Yet, when you're bidden so to do, you begin with one consent to make excuses. You are anxious about your homes; it is important that you live decently; and you forget that there can never be homes enough crowded on to this globe to pay for the losing of a single soul. It is not a question of whether you want to do this or that; it is a question of what God commands you to do and whether you will do it or simply make excuses."

At this, Deacon Buffington was seized with an idea within the scope of the minister's harangue, and forthwith proceeded to deliver himself of it:

"We've most on us got boys an' gals growin' up in this town, an' we've got to look a'ter their salvation. What chance is thar goin' tu be ef we larn 'em that a gal who goes wrong hes got to be treated the same's them that go right, ef only when she's caught she ses she's sorry?"

"This girl's soul is what we're wrestling for now," declared the clergyman; "and you merely insult God, when you attempt to excuse neglect of to-day's duty by pleading to-morrow's. If you are faithful servants of the Lord, it shall be given you in that hour what ye shall do, for it is not ye who do but the will of the Father which worketh in you to do."

"An' ef you save her soul an' send a dozen more to hell a-doin' it, what be ye goin' to say then?" demanded the deacon, with a leer of triumph on his face.

"Thy will, not mine, be done, oh Lord," the clergyman answered without a tremor.

"It's all very purty, pahson," broke in the postmaster, "but your idees hain't practical."

"They are not my ideas, but Jesus Christ's," retorted the clergyman. "He is the rock on which we build, or building we labour in vain."

"And you'd hev us let this gal into our houses? You'd hev us call her 'sister,' jest 'cause she's repented?" It was Deacon Buffington again.

"I never heard that Solomon Green repented; but he was at your house to supper this last week."

There was a sound suspiciously like a snicker from a far corner, for Deacon Buffington had daughters, and it was hinted that he, no less than Seagrave, would be glad to bring Green's acres into the family connection.

"But, pahson, purity is the crown o' womanhood." Farmer Warren was moralising.

"Obedience to God is the crown of manhood and womanhood both," corrected the clergyman sternly.

"The Bible condemns harlotry," interrupted old man Graves.

Then the postmaster saw his chance to pay back the thrust at his accounts.

"Ye hain't forgotten, hev ye, Brother Graves," he asked gently, "thet ye hed to marry Miss Graves to get rid o' the bastardy law?"

"You're a back-bitin', meddlesome old idjit," shouted Brother Graves, while the minister pounded on the desk for order, and when it was partially restored, demanded:

"Is this a meeting of brothers in Christ, or a tavern broil of those who are yet in the bonds of iniquity?"

Only one voice was raised in aid of the clergyman, that of Wilson, one of the youngest men present.

"It 's my guessin'," he said, "thet women hev a mighty hard time in this world. When they go wrong, it 's them that get all the cussin', and it 's the man ye try to save. I hain't heerd any of ye sayin' nothin' agin the feller that 's mixed up in this affair. She 's bad enuff, I guess; but what about him? She would n't a' done it, if she had n't loved him, I 'll bet on that; but I'd like to know ef you ken say as much fur him? I would n't want to, fur fear I 'd damage my standin' an' be called a liar. As fur what the pahson ses, I 'm with him. If this gal kin be saved, we 've got to save her. If she can't, I guess the Devil 's able to get everybody into hell thet needs to go thar, 'thout our hevin' to help kick 'em in."

Craig came away from the conference sick at heart and discouraged. He had brought his church face to face with God's commands and it had refused to heed them. How had he failed in his duty as a shepherd that this should be the result? "I have sown, O Lord!" he cried in his agony, "why, oh why, dost Thou refuse the increase?"

Wilson walked apart from the others, as they came from the church, for his elders were outraged that he should have supported the clergyman. He overtook Blanket and upbraided him for not coming to his support.

"You know we war right," he said.

"I hain't so cock-sure o' thet," Blanket retorted, "sence I lost a passenger en rout, as they say; the fust time it 's happened to me in twelve year o' stage drivin'. Sech things sorter take the starch outen a feller. But 's

near 's I kin make out, these fellers war sort o' thinkin'
'bout that part o' the Lord's Prayer that ses, 'don't lead
us into temptation'; an' I dunno but they 're 'bout
right. I hain't afeared fur the gal, but I swan thar's
some on 'em I would n't trust 's fur 's you could throw
a bull by the tail!"

CHAPTER XXIX

IS IT I?

HER old days of loneliness, with the year at the academy for background, carried no experience that made easier the terrible isolation in which Amanda Seagrave lived. In the fresh morning of days, she had caught a glimpse, amid the mists and clouds, of a new world, as virgin and fair, to her imagination, as a new creation. It lay for her just beyond the barrier of separation that had again shut down, unseen, but dream-visited. She had not seen enough to rob it of its glamour; she had seen enough for remembrance. Above all, there had been the promise of hope.

To-day, she had built herself into the cell of her own isolation, of which her sin was the walls, more enduring than brass. Ignorant, inexperienced, hungering for, she knew not what, she had grasped at love and companionship, and was an outcast. In her father's house, among her own kin-folk, she was more absolutely a stranger and a foreigner than she could have been in a land the most unknown.

She had believed in her love for Ashgrave to the very moment when honest life ceased to be possible save through that love. Then she learned that, whatever it was that had attracted her, it was not love. Innocent and pure in her every thought and dream, this sudden awakening to the knowledge that she loved another than her seducer filled her with loathing and, to her shuddering conscience, certified that it was carnal desire that had

led to ruin. She had made her confession in a terror of fear, and God had broken faith with her—or had found her unworthy of faith.

She believed that Barnaby would have understood, and Barnaby was dead!

Sullenly, hopelessly, she set her face toward life and isolation. Her mother would not even recognise her to the extent of upbraiding. Her father showed just that measure of tenderness that stung, with its hidden sorrow, without bringing the consolation of sympathy. Her brothers eyed her with wonder and boyish anger for the pity showered upon them. Her neighbours, thwarted in their effort to drive her away, made as if she had ceased to be.

She had her moods, and any but an unshrewd man would have learned them ere he attempted to deal with her face to face. To Craig, all that she was suffering was so infinitely trivial as to be meaningless, save in its relation to her final acceptance of truth. He asked of no one what he was not prepared himself to give; he gave to no one what he himself would not ask.

She had reached the point where the desire for companionship passed into the hunger of the famishing, and he came to talk with her of the salvation of her soul and the future life.

"I have not lived this one yet"; the cry was forced from her by her desolation.

"Set not your heart on earthly vanities," began the clergyman, but the swelling flood of protest against the barrenness of life burst bounds and she forgot even the respect due his calling, as she interrupted him with the cry:

"Earthly vanities! What do I know of vanities? Shut up as I have been in this old farmhouse, with no

one with whom to exchange a thought, excepting on everyday drudgery; with no fresh thought, no glimpse of all that the world is doing and thinking; nothing but this eternal coming and going of the same thing day in and day out ——”

Craig caught his breath, as the torrent of words poured forth, unable for the moment to take up again the broken thread of his preaching. Then his unimaginative mind asserted its prerogative and prevailed by its very weight.

“These things are less than naught. If it had seemed good to God that you should have them, He would have given them to you. He has not done so, and it is your duty to live the life He has appointed, making it the means of eternal salvation. These are the vital things of life ——”

“He gave me the desires that torment me — the wish for companionship, the desire to be happy, to know what the world is doing and to have my share in it ——”

“He gave these desires to be suppressed and conquered.”

“How do you know He did?” The demand was like a shot fired at close range, and would have staggered a man less firmly fixed than Craig. As it was, he answered directly and with that complete oblivion to personal containment that marks the priest who has merged himself in his vocation.

“Because I have battled with the same desires, and I did not know happiness until I yielded myself to God and obeyed his command.”

“And did you know happiness then? Do you know it now, here, in this narrow life that has no touch with the world; that means nothing, excepting the daily repetition of what has been done before?”

Craig felt the question one to be answered, and therefore to be weighed, lest in any degree he should fall short of the truth. She watched him eagerly without interruption, as with lowcled eyes he searched his soul. At last he raised his head, and in his face she read the answer, before he uttered it:

"Yes," he said solemnly, "I have found that peace that passeth understanding, and I found it when I could say without reserve, 'Thy will, not mine, be done.' I found it when I was at one with God. It was the at-onement, the atonement."

"When you ceased to be yourself, and became another."

"Yes," he said simply, "another's; that is, God's."

"It makes no difference who," she said. "It is another."

"Ah, but it is all the difference who," he answered. "We are most ourselves when most we lose ourselves in God."

"And you have done this?"

"Yes."

"And are content?"

"Content? Yes, happy."

"Then, whatever else you are, you are not a man!"

Out of her misery was born knowledge of the greater truth, which else had remained hidden for years, that the individual is in eternal variance to that which is not the individual, and that when that variance ceases, individuality, whether for better or worse, ceases. He, recognising God, had striven for individual effacement: she, in the travail throes of individuality, fought the demand, even though she saw as the alternate the barrenness and misery that already oppressed her.

"We are to crucify the flesh, that we may become heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ," he answered,

with a gentleness that surprised himself. He was groping for the means to help this tortured soul, and secretly crying to God for help, while yet his human judgment told him that he was stumbling and halting. "To be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace."

She listened, pleader that she was for bread, for the bread of life itself, and the threadbare phrases came to her meaningless and unsatisfying. He had given her a stone.

"Do you know," she asked, and surprised herself by her calmness; "that these are only words? They don't mean anything; they're just sound."

"They are the words of Him who spake as never man spake," he answered sternly.

"Yes," she said sagely, "but when the heart hungers for human speech and sympathy — then — then — the words that men speak — they come home to us; they have meaning! They are not so far off."

"But these," he said, sincerely anxious and striving to throw into his speech the real yearning to help that was so near his heart, "these are so great; as great as He who spoke them."

"Ah, that is the trouble," she said, smiling sadly. "They are so great. Some little word that thrilled with the love of one as weak as you yourself — it would come quicker to the heart."

He grew stern with sudden enlightenment.

"I am offering you the heavenly love; the eternal blessing; and your heart is fixed on earthly love," he said.

"I am still on earth," she answered. "Is all its sweetness to be denied? Has it nothing but bitterness?"

"Our present affliction, which is but for a moment,

worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

"But give me something I can lay hold of; something that I can touch and cling to," she cried. "You don't know how lonely I am; you don't know how lonely!"

Suddenly he rose and stretched out his hands toward her, his heart, too, crying pitifully for love. He, too, was a man, a man before he had been a priest, and he knew the hunger of a man.

But his action frightened her. It was as if a god had descended to her, when she had asked an earthly lover.

"Don't, don't!" she cried. "I — I have n't meant that."

He scarcely drew back.

"Have I no rights," he demanded bitterly, "simply because I am a clergyman?"

"But," she said, with quick feminine intuition, where masculine judgment was all at fault, "I love."

"Yes," he answered, "that brute!"

"No, no, no!" came the sudden flash of protest, "not him, not him!"

He drew back, chilled with quick repulsion. Deep somewhere in his humanness, too deep ever before to have appealed to his consciousness, was the concept, opposed to his every theory of truth, that in some measure the plea of love might be heard in palliation, if not in effacement, of this sin. Her denial of love was confession of wantonness, and at the same time revelation of the hope it killed.

His horror under revelation was too closely akin to hers under knowledge, for her to fail to read his act and the expression of his face. It was like the breaking of the last feeble thread that bound her to her kind. She hurried to excuse, where before she had scorned excuse.

"I thought I loved him — till it was too late."

"One may think he has no right to love," he said coldly; "but he knows whether he loves or not."

She had no answer, for in the light of knowledge his declaration was indisputable. Ever to have misunderstood was incomprehensible. To him her silence was confession, and yet there beat imperative behind the closed door of knowledge the human demand for light. Without his perceiving it, his demand was fulfilled of hope.

"Perhaps you merely think now that you love?"

Her desire beat strong for the relief of speech, to tell him of her love for Barnaby, her faith that he would have understood, and her double desolation in his death. But her quick instinct warned her that this man had become suddenly more or less than priest, and this knowledge held her silent. He felt himself degraded from his high office, and knew that the words he might have spoken would, for him, at least, be robbed of their single meaning. He could not speak as priest; he would not speak as man, and so the silence fell heavy between them and neither knew how to end it.

It seemed at last that she must cry out, that she must beg him to have mercy, not to sit there like an accusing spirit stirring to life all dead dreams to gibber and mouth at her desolation. A wild hysterical idea seized her that she could no longer control herself physically, that only physical tumult would save her from mental irresponsibility. She knew she was still holding herself in check, but she knew also that the moment was approaching when she would be unable longer to do so, and then would follow the outbreak. At this moment came his voice, speaking again:

"Ashgrave should marry you, and at once." He

was priest and penitent now, lashing himself at his own bidding with the whip of desire, and yet, perhaps, more than ever, mere man, applying the spur to his most human impulses.

"Oh, I could not! I could not!" she cried, and into the cry, she threw unconsciously something of that nervous revolt that was beating for relief. "I tell you I hate him, hate him. It is another I love."

"But another," he said, finding in speech greater coolness of thought than in silence, "cannot marry you now. Marriage with Ashgrave would restore your name and in a little time people would forget."

To this impotence had his paltering brought him! A priest of literalness, to whom the untrammeled Word was single guide, who counted as naught the penalties or judgments of the world, and was cold and unmoved in his cruelty, he was counselling her to marry the man for whom she owned hate, that her neighbours might forget and she regain her name and place, as if thereby the blackness of her sin would be lightened, or the eternal problem of salvation would be nearer solution!

He felt the shame of his position, and hung on her words for the rebuke which, spoken by her lips, he would have received as of God. To his surprise she answered him with almost commonplace simplicity, falling into his mood, with strange contrast to her former excitement.

"Would it help my father and mother, if I married him?"

"Yes — with the community."

"I must do it, then," she said, no more understanding the sudden calmness that had come to her than did her companion. "I have brought them enough sorrow; at least I can do this."

He rose to the strange ending of his mission. It was

all that he had actually counselled, and yet his whole being was in revolt at her surrender. The priest, however, asserted himself.

"I will see him and lay on him his duty."

"There is no need," and a shudder ran through her with the remembrance of their last meeting. "He has been ready, it is I who have refused."

Refused, and because she loved another? Who could it be in that community? Suddenly all the traditions of his days were swept away as a mist that the morning sun disperses, and he stood a man, untouched of that which had hidden him even from himself. With one step he held her in his arms.

"Amanda, Amanda," he cried, "I love you more than my vows. Is it I, you know you love?"

She looked at him frightened and wild. She did not even struggle for an instant. Then, with crimsoned cheeks, and frightened with mistake of his purpose, she struggled free, and cried in her anger:

"No, no, it is Barnaby!"

CHAPTER XXX

MARRIAGE IS ARRANGED

A SHGRAVE was at work in the fields when Amanda came up the lane from the highway in the early morning. His first thought was full conception that she could have come to him with one only purpose. His heart beat quicker, and there was a confused humming in his ears, as he started across the rough ground to meet her.

She wasted no words in preliminaries.

"Joe," she began, as soon as he was within speaking distance, "it's right we should get married."

Something in her tone struck him as implying confidence that he merely awaited her assent, and instantly stirred revolt which had become quiet under her former refusal. The male holds to the right of formal proposal, even when it has ceased to be aught but a form.

"Humph!" he grunted. "You change your mind every time I see you."

"No," she said, "I had n't thought of it before as a matter of right and wrong. There's nothing else for us to do."

"A man does n't want a wife," he growled, "who comes to him because there's nothing else for her to do. He wants her because she wants him, and would marry him if there were a thousand other things that she could do. Would you marry me if there was anything else you could do?"

"No," she said, "not now. I would once."

"Well, once is gone! I was urging you then and I got my answer. You can take it back now, and see what comfort I got out of it."

He turned and strode back to his work, leaving her on the edge of the rough ground. She had never seemed to him more beautiful, more to be desired than as he turned away. If she had met him with denial and compulsion to plead, he could have urged his suit, not under simulation of love, but with dominance of passion that grows under restraint. But for a second time she had offered herself to him, not in the name of love, not even with the admission of desire, but simply in the name of necessity, at the behest of a conscience that could weigh the claims of right or wrong. No love, not even that which had been the solace of lonely years and half-felt isolation, could glow in such an atmosphere as this.

He recognised her very offer as denial of love, as she meant it to be. On no other terms could the sacrifice be tolerable. The very abhorrence of marriage without love which she felt, alone made possible what she sought to do and, with the passion of despair, was bent on doing. Only under the impulse of a dominant passion could such a woman consummate a complete self-giving, and, lacking the passion of love, there remained only the passion of sacrifice which, like love, gives all, but, unlike love, demands nothing. Of a lesser sacrifice she would have been incapable. It was only to the greatest that her courage was equal.

When he had begun his work again, she turned and walked to the house. She laid off her bonnet and began setting the kitchen in order. He had watched her under the brim of his hat and now came with long strides and stood in the low doorway.

"I want you to get out of here," he said in a sullen,

menacing tone. Fear of himself, no less than anger at her defiance of his refusal, was upon him.

"You've shut every other door to me," she said, with a quietness that struck him as peculiarly uncomfortable. "Will you turn me out of this, too?"

"You did it yourself, with your damned foolish confession," he grumbled.

She went on with her work, without the answer which would have left her weaker. He came in and threw his hat on the table.

"Are you going?" he demanded.

"No."

He grew livid in his anger, and his hands twitched in a nervous paroxysm.

"I'll throw you out!" he threatened, his words low with the stifling of his anger.

"Perhaps you'll murder me, as your father did his wife," she answered, knowing the power she had to sting him in this accusation. "Still I stay."

Her tall, lithe form was drawn up to its full height, as she stood facing him, defying his strength. She was wonderfully beautiful — the most beautiful thing he had ever seen. He had known that for long years, but never before as now. The strong purpose that gave character to her face swept away the one defect that sometimes marred her grace and beauty. He was angry anew that she so came to him, unresisting, nay, insistent, as to stir every combative fibre of his body and make it impossible to take her in his arms and own her his, as he longed to do.

He came up and took her roughly by the shoulder, as he had done that other day when he thrust her from the house.

"You'll go," he said between his teeth, "or you'll be sorry!"

She put it to him with unembellished plainness.

"I'm an intruder in my father's house; there's not a door in the village that is open to me. Here, where I lost my rights of womanhood, it is my right to stay."

"I'm to take what nobody else will have," he sneered.

"Yes, unless you can restore what you have already taken."

"This is my house," he said.

"It is mine, as well," she answered. "Whether you marry me or not, I stay. There is nothing else left me."

She kept bringing this forward, as if there was danger he would forget it. It was the sting of the lash that she laid upon him. It was as well the sting of the denial he was placing upon desire. He was angry that desire survived while will refused and he doubly steeled himself against compulsion that sought to trap desire as its ally. It was with Amanda as with all else, she was not to be his so long as she was good enough for another; but now that all Padanaram rejected her, she thought he would be eager to marry her. He held his lust a traitor to himself, because it proved not a dead thing before possible possession.

But was it true that she was barred from possible marriage with any save himself? He could name unchaste girls who had become wives and whose past had been forgotten. Some of Seagrave's acres, stocked with sheep or cattle, might work wonders, and even Seagrave's iron grasp might loosen if he hoped thereby to escape the shame and the woundings of pride that were his. Or, indeed, suppose Barnaby should return?

Then suddenly swept through him the consuming fire of jealousy. Amanda had promised Barnaby that she would marry him, and it was only because she believed him dead that she came and offered herself to

him. If he came back, as he at least knew might happen, would she not try again to capture him, in spite of the barrier she had affirmed as shutting her from all human association save with him? It would be a fine thing, after he had denied desire, to see another possess her! She had proved fickle once; it argued that only opportunity was needed for her to prove so again. He would take her at her word; he would shut that door, at least, to her future rehabilitation save through him, and to her consoling herself for him through another. At the same time he would place on her the deepest stigma that could fall on a woman, a stigma that would almost leave her present position to be desired: the stigma of rejection and refusal by the man whose right to her was undeniable.

"I'll marry you," he said, speaking quickly, "but I won't live with you afterward."

Here was revealed a new world of possibility. Hitherto, marriage and living together had been synonymous terms. If separation were possible, it would come as reprieve to the condemned. Ignorant of the estimate which a community like Padanaram would place upon a woman who lived separately from her husband, she grasped at the offer as a revelation of escape.

Impatient to have the matter over, now that he had yielded, he agreed to go to Belmont for the license either that day or the next. Then ensued discussion whether the marriage should be by the clergyman or a magistrate. He had assumed she would want Craig, and thought to satisfy her by the suggestion. She, under memory of her last interview with the clergyman, flushed and declared for a magistrate, but without naming any reason; whereupon, irritated that he should be thwarted in his effort to please her, he insisted upon his suggestion,

because it was his. So they struck fire and were quarrelling again.

They were in the shaded pathway now, where she had heard Barnaby's declaration, and the sharp contrast deepened her grief and, as well, her shame that she was capable of a marriage without love, even for the sake of restoring her name. For him, as well, the spot stirred memory, with deepened purpose to bar Barnaby if by chance he returned. She rebelled at the masterful tone of the man whose right was confined simply to the giving of his name, and for an instant asked herself if it were not the lesser disgrace to submit to wrong rather than to condone it. With sharp unhappiness she foresaw her final answer long before she admitted that question had ceased.

CHAPTER XXXI

ASHGRAVE AND CRAIG

A SHGRAVE took up his work again, under the warm September sun, asking himself if he had done well or ill, in his sudden agreement. For the moment his desire toward the girl, which tormented him when she was near, was dominated by his anger that that which he would prize in the seeking should come to him unsought. In turn, this mood had yielded to his jealous memory, and he promised, but even in his promise had he thrown away possession in denial.

If he was to enter into such a marriage, his inherited superstitions or belief told him that there was far less risk of unpardonable sin in the violation of a marriage promise made before a magistrate, than of one which had received the sanction of the church; and yet, with the certainty staring him in the face of violation of marriage promises made in knowledge of pre-arranged separation, his pride, or temper or something had spurred him to insistence on marriage by the clergyman!

"I 'm a damned fool, when temper gets hold of me," he said, and then, with a lurking sense of humour that lightened anger, he added — "Perhaps I might have left out that limitation."

He looked up and saw Simeon Craig beside him.

Instantly anger flamed and he forgot that he had use for this man. "Have n't you had enough of coming here?" he demanded, assuming his gruffest tone.

Craig spoke abruptly, with the directness of a man who knows what he has to say and whose business presses.

"It's your duty to marry Amanda Seagrave."

Ashgrave knew how greatly his desire ran with his duty, and he knew too that his own obstinacy of anger under compulsion had left him merely the husk of duty without the kernel of reward. Craig's words carried the sting of his own self-thwartings.

"Could n't you meddle a little?" he sneered.

"It's my duty," Craig began.

"Oh, you're great on duty, ain't you?" interrupted Ashgrave.

"You've ruined the girl," Craig began again.

"How do you know she has n't ruined me?" demanded Ashgrave, determined that the clergyman should not finish his sentence.

"You've brought disgrace to her family," he went on without heed to the interruption.

"They were ready enough to disgrace me when I did want to marry her," said Ashgrave, sullenly.

"And because she clung to you and gave herself to you, you take your revenge on the defenceless girl, like a great hulking coward."

Surprise at this non-clerical tone of attack prevented Ashgrave from interrupting. For answer he was reduced to the assertion:

"You know whether I'm a coward or not."

"So do you," said Craig sharply. "The man who'll take advantage of weakness don't need anybody to tell him he's a coward."

Ashgrave flushed under sting of truth. He resented it from a clergyman as he would from a woman. It was true he had attacked Craig once, but he felt with regard to it much as he would if he had struck a woman. There

was cowardice in attacking one who, by nature or calling, was barred from defence, and it was this that gave Craig's charge its point. Under sudden memory, he placed a curb on his rising anger.

"You want to drive me to hit you again," he said.

Craig misinterpreted his speech.

"You would n't threaten, if you did n't know you were wrong."

"Damn you!" he shouted. "It 's none of your business whether I 'm right or wrong. Go play the parson among girls and white-livered cusses."

He turned and walked away, afraid, in spite of his resolve, that he might again strike Craig. The desire to do so was strong on him, almost as strong as on the morning when he struck Barnaby. Some of these days, when that desire came, he would strike a man and kill him. Might it not be as well to do it now and have the thing over? He glanced from the corner of his eye at the clergyman, who was following him, with a dim wonder how he would look, dead, and whether a single blow would do the work? He hoped not, for he felt the lust to strike and mangle and revel in the work of killing.

"Have a care," Craig called after him. "If you don't marry the girl, I 'll not only deny you the communion, but I 'll see you 're expelled from the church."

Even in his narrowness, he was too large-minded to take account of the personal in the other's taunt.

As for Ashgrave, the threat struck fear for the first time through the armour of his anger. Thus far, in spite of all his vagaries, he had striven, with almost pathetic insistence, to maintain position in the community. He understood himself well enough to know that to break definitely with it meant swift deterioration.

He knew too well the community not to understand what expulsion from the church meant.

Ashgrave started back, turning quickly. Craig was certain he was about to attack him, and sought decision whether or not he should resist. The instinct of personal defence had long struck him as opposed to Biblical command, but he had never followed the issue to conclusive judgment. It was scarcely the time to do so, with this young giant bearing down on him in angry hostility.

"It is n't your business," Ashgrave began, pausing in his strides only when beside him, "but so you won't think it's your meddling that's done it, I'll tell you I've decided already to marry the girl. If you'd stuck your nose in before I promised, you'd have dished the whole thing. If you don't want to do it now, get off my farm, and get off damned quick!"

The clergyman grew white with the agony of knowledge. So this brute was to marry Amanda! There was a strange straining at his heart-strings in the thought. Surely God was laying a heavy cross on him!

CHAPTER XXXII

ASHGRAVE AND BLANKET

BELMONT, as county-town, commanded respect that was sadly reduced by its toleration of a tavern and a Roman Catholic mission. The former was under suspicion of illicit liquor selling; the latter under perpetual indictment as a menace to Christianity. When Joe Ashgrave separated himself from bodily association with Padanaram and instead adopted regular Saturday afternoon, with occasional Sunday, visits to Belmont, there came into being in the former village a sweetly Christian certainty that he would fall under one, and possibly under both, of these baleful influences.

The regularity of these visits began in sheer hunger for companionship, from which he had done as much to cut himself off, by his absurd marriage, as had been done through the unsupported suspicions aroused by Barnaby's disappearance. It was barely a fortnight after the marriage, from which Amanda had gone to her father's home and he to the lonely hill-farm, when he saw Blanket, who never cherished an animosity strong enough to prevent his welcoming any man as a gossip.

"Any news?" Ashgrave asked, not undesirous of hearing what the village might be thinking and saying of his affairs, though ready on the instant to resent its interference.

"Nothin' I 've heerd on," said Blanket, shaking his head. "Seem 's ef folks never would get their breath back so's they c'd talk agin."

"You have n't lost yours, have you?" asked Ashgrave, half-laughing.

"Wall," he explained, "things hes come so thick an' fas' lately, it kinder seem's ef a feller did n't know which eend to begin at. Fact is, ye kinder feel's ef ye was plumped down in the middle an' hed to work towards both eends at wunce, ef you 's ever goin' to get out."

"Humph! Padanaram must have grown into a sort of lively place," said Ashgrave. "I should never have expected it."

"Wall, that's so'thin' as ye look at it," Blanket rejoined. "Gin'rally speakin' they keep a doin' an' a talkin' all the time, an' I don't see ef 'twas big as Bost-ing, they could du eny more. Thar'd jest be more folks to scatter it over."

"What they talking about now?"

"Wall, thar's thet feller Barnaby; or ruther, thar hain't thet feller Barnaby. He kinder makes more talk now he hain't thar 'n he did when he was. It's kinder like one o' these ere steam ingines, thet kin back's well's it kin go furwards."

"They seem to have got Barnaby on the brain," said Ashgrave, impatiently. "Nobody asked where he came from when he dropped out o' the sky. What in thunder are they so particular where he went to, when he took a notion to leave again?"

"T ain't got a habit yet tu hev men go out like a candle when ye say 'puff!' P'raps when it hes, we won't be no more cu'rous whar they be 'n we be whar the candle-flame is a'ter you've blown it out. They say thar's nothin' like gettin' used to things."

"Perhaps that's so," rejoined Ashgrave bitterly, "but there are some things it's damned hard getting used to."

"Yep," said Blanket cautiously, "yep, I sh'd think

't would be. Sech like, fur instance, es th' new way o' gettin' merried, though I hain't sayin', mind you, it hesn't advantages to recommend it."

At the first word of marriage, Ashgrave's watchfulness was roused and he flushed hot with anger. He bethought himself, however, that if Padanaram was giving any attention to him and his marriage, as it probably was, here was a chance, not to be thrown away, of hearing its verdict. He did his best to give a soft answer, but the nearest he could come to it was:

"I s'pose Padanaram can't mind its own business, but has got to meddle with my affairs."

"Wall," said Blanket, crossing his knees and resting an elbow on the upper one as a support to his head, "I 've lived in this world mor 'n sixty year, an' I hain't seen the time yet when other folk's affairs war n't more pertickelerly everybody else's bisness 'n anything else in the world. Ef we didn't hev to 'tend to some other folk's consarns, most on us would hev a mighty lazy time on it, I 'm thinkin'."

"Most Padanaram would," asserted Ashgrave.

"Padynarum," said Blanket, "ain't big, fur a fac'; but so fur as the scripchurel duty o' lookin' a' ter your neighbour's consarned, it don't knuckle to nobody."

"And so it's been meddling with my affairs?"

"It's ben a sorter watchin' to see how this ere new kinder marriage works. Thar's them as thinks 't would save a heap o' quarrellin' an' fussin', an' thar's them thet ses but fur the name on 't, a feller might jest as well not be merried at all. Some think Phil Buff'nt'n hit the nail on the head, but mind ye, I bean't sayin' one way nor tother."

"Phil Buffington!" said Ashgrave, sure that the name

carried some unkindness. "I'd as soon think of your old hoss saying something sensible as Phil."

"Wall, ye know Balaam's ass did speak ——"

"Yes, and asses have been keeping the thing up ever since."

"I hain't gainsayin' thet," answered Blanket. "What Phil ses is that 't ain't so bad when a gal won't hev ye, 'cause thar's others; but 's mighty tuff when yer own wife won't hev ye, 'cause ye're tied up so's ye can't get nobody else."

Thus, under cover of Phil Buffington's jibe, Ashgrave learned what Padanaram was saying of his peculiar marriage, and it came sharply to him that it was just what he might have expected. The stigma of rejection, which he had sought to place on Amanda, had been turned against himself by the most natural process in the world.

"I said the whole breed of asses had been talking since Balaam's time," he retorted angrily.

"Seem's though some on em'd ben busy doin' things tu," suggested Blanket.

"Excepting minding their own business!"

"Wall, thet's 'cordin' to how ye look at it. Kinder seems tu me's ef it was yer business to marry a decent gal, like 'Mandy Seagrave, a'ter you'd got her in the scrape you hed, an' I swan I dunno's I blame her one mite fur not wantin' tu hev a 'tarnal thing tu du'th you a' terward."

"I 'spose you've all been too great fools even to think that perhaps 't was me would n't have anything to do with her," growled Ashgrave.

"Wall look a here Joe," chuckled Blanket, "thar be some things that a orthodox Christian can't swaller besides the Pope o' Rome. Folks kinder think they

know ye, an' they guess you hain't made that way, 'specially when they hear tell o' your carryin's on with the Plunket gals and other critters o' that kin'. No, ye hain't likely to hev that kin' o' tom-foolishness to answer fur."

"I wonder my ears have n't burned off long ago, with all these old women's tongues a-wagging over my affairs."

"T is sorter cu'rous," Blanket admitted. "Got kinder casehardened, I guess; fur they hev jest ben a makin' things hum sence 'Mandy walked out o' the pahson's, head an' tail up, an' never looked at ye. I don't guess Padynarum's enj'yed anything quite so much fur a long time."

Ashgrave turned angrily away, stung with the sense of his utter failure in the affair. He had denied himself his own wife for the purpose of degrading her as a punishment for forcing marriage on him, and the only return was to have it supposed that she had refused to live with him, in spite of his legal claim upon her.

Blanket maintained his position of absolute quiescence and allowed Ashgrave to move a rod or more away. Then, without lifting his head or raising his voice, he said:

"Say!"

"What is it?" demanded Ashgrave sharply, looking back but not retracing his steps.

"They've got a raal wil' man up Milbank way. A lot o' boys an' gals a'ter nuts ran onto him, an' they say he's ben seen round the barnyards in the mornin', an' when he's heerd of, eggs is scurce an' the cows is slack o' milk."

"Some fellow hiding out in the woods," said Ashgrave, more as an answer than because of any real interest he had in the story.

"Yas, it looks thet-a-way," Blanket admitted. "Cu'rous nobody's ever found out what come of that thar Barnaby, hain't it?"

Ashgrave turned hot and then cold at the question. He never quite knew whether Blanket was a fool or a knave, and it never seemed more a question than at this instant.

"What do you mean by that?" he demanded brusquely.

"Nothin'," replied Blanket, still passively inert, "only talkin' o' this tother critter kinder made me think o' him. He was a pretty likely sorter feller, 'cordin' to my way o' thinkin'."

"This wild man," demanded Ashgrave, with impatient brushing aside of Blanket's digression, "has he done any damage? Hurt anybody?"

"I hain't heerd o' none, 'ceptin' eggs an' milk. He seems friendly like, so they say, an' thet's to his credit, fur mostly when folks is scart, they're likely to find so'-thin', so's not to look so pesky silly, even ef they hev tu make it up."

"I hain't concerned with what folks do or don't do," interrupted Ashgrave. "What do you know?"

"I don't guess the U. S. mail could wait fur me to tell ye the hull on it," said Blanket cautiously. "I might kiver eny partic'lar subject you was interested in."

"Oh, damn all you know! I 'spose you could keep talking till judgment day, if you wanted to. What do you know about this wild man?"

"Jest what I tolle ye," said Blanket, not a little chagrined by the poverty of resource he was compelled to admit. "I hain't hed no chance to get at him."

"No. If you had, he'd be wilder 'n he is now."

Ashgrave turned and started away again. Blanket

let him go a few steps and then brought him up again with that sharp,

"Say!"

"What cock and bull story is 't this time?" Ashgrave demanded sourly, yet moving back slowly, in the hope he might hear something more.

"Consid'rin' your experunce es a merried man, would ye advise a feller like me to make up tu the Widder Marlow?"

"Go to hell!" exclaimed Ashgrave, turning away again.

Blanket looked after him with solemn eyes for a moment and then, starting his horse, said tc himself:

"Thet 's so'thin' like them tex's ye can read two ways tu once. I wonder whether he means fur me to get merried or keep out on it."

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE HORROR OF LONELINESS

MORE than once, as a pastime of his loneliness, Ashgrave had pictured Barnaby to himself a wanderer into the wilderness to the north and east, and even as dying there of exposure and want. The mention of the supposed wild man ran naturally with this picture, even if Ashgrave had not been startled by Blanket's use of Barnaby's name. Just what that mention implied, Ashgrave was at a loss to understand, and between the alternates of a mere accident and of a suspicion that sought confirmation, he was inclined to the latter.

In any event, the incident was excuse for a trip to Belmont, where news might be had and where at the tavern he could at least see a Milbank paper. So after early chores, he put the horse into the old open buggy and drove over. As usual, Bill Holden and Si Patterson, with their cronies, were found in the tavern office. Their loud talk and rough banter fed his hunger for companionship and, with frequent visits to certain remote parts of the premises, made him forget the errand on which he had come. He was already growing glum with the thought of the long drive and the dull dark house that awaited him, when from behind the desk, Bartlett, the proprietor, called out:

"By gum, Ashgrave, ef I hev n't ben a thinkin' you 'd done up that feller Barnaby that was missin' over your way, an' here he turns up in Milbank, by gosh!"

Ashgrave gave a start and felt something clutch at

his heart, which for an instant seemed to stop beating. To carry off the matter, he tried to answer indifferently.

"Was he that wild man?"

"I did n't say nothin' erbout a wild man," answered Bartlett, looking at him a little curiously. "It's him, but how did you know?"

"I did n't," replied Ashgrave. "Only Blanket told me about one over there, and I sorter connected the two when you said Barnaby had turned up."

Ashgrave reached out his hand and took the paper, while the others gathered around and read over his shoulder. The most had been made of meagre facts. A wild man had been reported as living in the woods, where he had frightened several parties of boys and girls. He had been at some farms in search of food, and always appeared harmless and even friendly. At last a posse was raised and had found him living in an old hut some four miles from the village, to which he had been brought and there lodged at the poor farm. Physicians who examined him gave the opinion that he had been brought up in at least comparative affluence. They found him suffering from an injury to the head, with pressure of the skull on the brain, resulting in a partial paralysis of certain muscles and also in loss of memory. They were of opinion that a comparatively simple operation would remove the pressure and completely restore the man to his normal condition. The name of "Barnaby" on a portion of the clothing had given a clue to identity, which was followed up by a detective who had been employed in the search for Francis Barnaby, who disappeared some months before from Padanaram. He had placed himself in touch with young Barnaby's father, with the result of the complete identification of the wild man as the missing man.

At the very end of the long-winded article was a single sentence which Ashgrave read and re-read before he laid down the paper.

The physicians who have examined young Barnaby, and they include all of our most distinguished members of the medical fraternity as well as some noted names from down the river, who have been attracted by the unusual and highly interesting features of a most notable case, are of the opinion that not only can the young man be wholly restored but also that when he has recovered his normal condition his faculty of memory will be restored and he will be able to recall and state all the circumstances up to the moment of his injury which preceded his disappearance, and identify any one who may have been instrumental in inflicting it, if it was not a pure accident as, we may say in passing, Mr. Fry, the local detective, does not think it was.

This sentence, clumsy and involved, brought sharply home to Ashgrave his danger through Barnaby's restoration, danger theretofore lost sight of when he thought of such restoration as possible, in the greater interest of the anticipated revenge of his actual marriage with Amanda.

"Gosh!" exclaimed Bill Holden, "the cuss 's goin' tu get well! Now we 'll know what darned trick Joe played on him."

It was that subtle, intangible and non-resistible danger, which is the spirit of the law, of which Ashgrave felt the unseen menace. Here was the sharp dividing line, which separated conduct into the moral and immoral, according as it did or did not render one amenable to the law. An arrest in itself, not in the essence of the act that caused it, would have for him disgrace; and the act which, because forbidden by law, was wrong, would have lost its wrongful character with the repeal of the legislation which prescribed the penalty. To this band of cronies, he would have felt no compunction

in telling exactly what had passed between him and Barnaby. He resented Holden's insinuation only because behind towered the shadow of the constable.

"Hi, Joe, your sins be a findin' you out, beant they?" cackled Si Patterson.

"Shut up your old bean-trap!" shouted Ashgrave, sharp with the fear of an unknown danger.

"Bein' as you did n't kill him, what 'n thunder did you do to him, Joe?" asked Bartlett.

"I've told all I know about it more 'n a hundred times," said he doggedly, the instinct of denial reasserting its force.

"I hain't sayin' you 're lyin', Joe," said the landlord, "but I be sayin' you 're doin' jest what I do when I lie."

Ashgrave buttoned his coat, drew on his mittens, and going to the horse-shed, unfastened his horse and started homeward without a word. Dread and perplexity were too heavy upon him for idle anger, and these companions were not of those who could help him. As he drove through the clear night, the wish for Amanda strove for place in his mind with the fear of Barnaby's restoration. Her clearmindedness, her calm, unflinching fidelity, her womanly spirit of self-sacrifice, these were the qualities that had made her for him preëminent among women, and if mere passion had played its part, it had come as the incident of opportunity, and not as the dominant force, as it had been with other women. He turned to her now with the thought that she was his, and he had the right to command.

But had he? He had made his own terms and she had accepted them. Was he in position to call them off and ask that in their relationship which he had expressly excluded? Moreover, his danger came through Barnaby,

and it was Barnaby who had stood between them and first revealed to her the gulf that was fixed between them. With a countryman's suspicion, he had no faith in a fidelity that ran counter to desire, unless there was the prospect of material gain, which did not exist in this case. His claim, emasculated by his own act, held no promise for him when it was set against Barnaby.

The aid, which he asserted to himself he had the right to command, was to him of all men impossible.

The house stood dark, a blackness against the midnight heavens. He put the horse in stall and gave him generous bedding. In so simple an act, he was doing something for a living creature, and it gave him comfort. He passed the oxen lying in the straw and chewing their cud, and slapped them on the haunches, as he would give them greeting. Then he looked into the cow-shed, and stood listening to the soft breathing of the cows and yearlings.

He was not afraid of the darkness of the house; the shadows that lurked in corners and waited for him at the opening of a door had no terrors for him. The terrible thing was the absence of a living, breathing thing in the vacant rooms. Their emptiness stared at him from the windows; the silence spoke of it, the very echo of his steps was companionless.

In the stall next the horse that was munching the extra oats he had given it, he scattered a double allowance of clean yellow straw. Then rolling a blanket for a pillow, he wrapped another about him and lay down on the rude bed. At least, if he awoke in the night, he would hear the movements of the horse, the rhythmic sound of cud-chewing, the soft breathing of oxen, the rattle of chains, the occasional twittering of swallows in the high roof. Every sound would tell of something living close at

hand, while within the house reigned the awful silence of companionless voids.

Not until morning did Ashgrave take note that he had not looked at the date of the Milbank paper. If it were a week or a fortnight old, it might well be that the danger was already farther advanced than he had thought. In the evening he drove again to Belmont and, avoiding the tavern and crowd surely to be found there, sought a shopkeeper whom he knew to be a subscriber. There, confirming his fears, he learned that the paper was ten days old, and in the later issue he read that the elder Mr. Barnaby had been to Milbank and had taken his son home to Newburyport.

The paper stated:

He brought an expert with him from Portland, who, after a careful examination, confirms in every particular the diagnosis of our local physicians to whose skill and clear medical and surgical knowledge he pays a tribute that can but be gratifying to their many friends and especially reassuring to any who may have to call on any of them for medical service. He has no question that young Mr. Barnaby will be speedily restored to complete health and that he will be able to fix the responsibility for his injury on the guilty party of whose identity, it may be said, there exists little doubt in the minds of those best acquainted with the particulars of this remarkable affair, though for reasons that will be readily understood without stating them, it is deemed best by all interested, that no hint be given to the public at this time. We have no hesitation in saying, however, that when an arrest is made, as there will be very soon, it will confirm the sagacity of those who have worked on the case and already foresee the inevitable outcome of the matter.

He had nothing material to an estimate of what might be regarded as "speedy" reinstatement in a case like this, nor of whether already the net might not be ready to draw and enclose him. Under the spur of this uncertainty, he rushed into a very frenzy of work during

the day, and at night drove to Belmont for the sake of the companionship which the tavern yielded, and with the hope of securing further information. Some nights he passed at Belmont, reaching the farm only at daylight. On others he came at midnight, only to be daunted by the black vacancy of the house. On these, as on that first night, he slept in the empty stall, rather than brave the loneliness and silence of his bedchamber.

During this week, he fought out with himself the question of a demand on Amanda to come and live with him. More than once he started for Seagrave's, with the purpose of carrying out such a plan, but always was he drawn back by a sense of the foolish position in which he was placing himself, or by the strong conviction, which he could not escape, that to admit Amanda was to place a spy on behalf of Barnaby in his house and at the point of espial on his every act.

By his marriage to her, her good name had been restored; that she loved Barnaby and not himself, he had her own words to prove; in the final issue, the fight between himself and Barnaby would be fought for her possession, in which she must be counted as Barnaby's ally. Was a man in his senses, under such circumstances, to make her the companion of his days and nights, however he might be famished with loneliness?

While yet under the dominance of this uncertainty, he recalled a young Canadian lad, the nephew of the hostler and man of all work at Belmont Tavern. He was a clean-cut fellow of eighteen or nineteen, small and lithe, with black hair and eyes, and a look of mischief loving that attracted Ashgrave by its very opposition to every quality he himself possessed. The snatch of song on Henri's lips; the light jest; the greeting to a passing girl, born of joyousness rather than passion;

the utter abandon to the fact of living, as cause for happiness, were to Ashgrave the unattainable, and therefore the attractive, even though in sober moments despicable.

On the eighth day of his torture, he went to Belmont and brought back with him the boy Henri, to be the companion of his doubly lonely, because terror-ridden, life at the farm.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE CLASH OF CREEDS

THE snows had melted in the south-lying fields and on sun-open hill-tops, but there were still patches under trees to the north, and in the deeper ravines drifts lingered that were eloquent of slowly passing winter. The skunk cabbage was green in marshy places, and when the sun touched them, the young maples and willows showed red and yellow, with the sap that ran in their veins. The maple crop had been gathered, and the farmers were drawing out the manure from pits and yards and spreading it on the fields.

Amanda Ashgrave came to the door, and under the shelter of the wood-shed stood, bare-headed and bare-armed, in the April sunshine. Her face told of the keen suffering of a soul that had infinite capacity for sorrow, coupled with proud endurance that grew with disappointment. She was colourless and thin, and her eyes were ringed with darkness that gave them a far-away, yearning expression. Her bare arms were thin, yet strong from the effects of hard work. Her seven months of wifehood had been seven months of widowhood, during which she had served in her father's house, as a slave to all household tasks. Ashgrave never attended meeting, nor came to the village, and she had scarcely seen him since the evening of the marriage.

"The pahson does seem to come here all times o' day an' night," It was her mother's querulous voice behind her,

"P'raps if you 'll tell him you don't want him, he 'll stop." She answered without turning her head. They had come to a pass where they threw their speeches at each other instead of talking direct.

"Ef you 'd tell him, 't might du some good."

Amanda turned angrily.

"He don't come to see me!"

"Men, tho' they be pahsons, don't come to see women thathev got children's old's they be."

Nothing pleased Mrs. Seagrave more than to anger her daughter. She was one of those women who shun wickedness solely through fear, and begrudge others all that they think they themselves forego through self-denial.

"He 's the clergyman," answered Amanda, holding in leash her anger, as she had learned in the long months of loneliness.

"Clergyman or beggarman, he 's a man hain't he, an' 'tain't fur no good they run a'ter a woman, 'specially one that 's made a slip an' whose husband hain't round."

Amanda's cheeks turned crimson as she reentered the house. They had been made to burn many a time in the cruel days since her marriage. It is one of the privileges of our own to say what no stranger would dare say, and Mrs. Seagrave was one to make the most of the few privileges life had left her.

Craig had seen Amanda at the door. Her hurried retreat startled anew his conscience, which he had quieted with the opiate of fiction, in the form of a pretended pastoral visit. He turned away to where Seagrave himself was directing the moving of the manure, and was soon in a running discussion over the mixed subject of church management and top-dressing.

The younger man was of opinion that the farmers

would have to buy more artificial dressing in the future.

"Some are buying guano now. The rest of you'll have to come to that or something like it by and by."

The farmer thought that what came out of the land should go back into it.

"It's the rule o' nater. We'd orter feed our crops instead o' sellin' 'em off an' starvin' the land. We've ben too much a'ter quick money, instead o' waitin' to turn 'em into cattle."

"We might do more in the way of horses and sheep," the clergyman suggested. "Vermont is getting ahead of us in sheep."

The farmer agreed on horses. Maine could beat the world there, had, indeed; but sheep was a new notion.

"Folks now-a-days is like them fellers in Athens, that Paul preached to, allus runnin' a'ter new things. They're goin' to hev a priest and mass over to Belmont ev'ry Sabbath day, I hear."

Craig had not heard of it, and looked his distress at the news.

"I must prepare a series of sermons on the falsity of the Roman Catholic Church," he said earnestly. "It won't do to let our people go unwarned of the danger that threatens them."

The farmer looked at him quizzically, with an apparently shrewed suspicion that his warning might prove less wise than zealous; but he had his theory of feeding the land with what it produced to develop, and he went back to that as of more immediate importance than the dangers of the worshippers at Padanaram falling under the domination of Rome.

"Your son-in-law is following your advice," said the clergyman, who made it a point of conscience to men-

tion Ashgrave whenever he came to the house, with the fatal predilection of many good people to fan a flame of hatred, which, if let alone, might finally die out. "He wintered more stock than ever before."

"An' he wintered that thar Canuck, too," growled the farmer, who did not forget that his daughter had some claim on the Ashgrave farm.

"He seems a steady, hard-working fellow."

"Thet don't make no difference in his eatin' his head off. Thar hain't ben nothin' thar he could arn his salt doin'," the farmer declared. "Besides, Joe's ben over tu Belmont with him to mass, more 'n once."

"Can it be? Can it be?" demanded Craig, alarmed at the hint that the errors of Romanism were creeping into his very circle. The farmer had kept a closer watch than the clergyman suspected. A farm of a hundred acres of fair land was not to be lost for want of looking after another's affairs.

Craig, who had come with the hope of catching a moment with Amanda, put aside the temptation, dangled before him by the farmer, of a formal call at the house. He went back to the highway, since the fields were as yet too wet for crossing, and so found himself headed for the Ashgrave farm.

That Henri was a Catholic, a child of the Scarlet Woman, he had known; yet he had never raised his voice against him! He should have known better. He should have known the wiles of the devil to trap the elect, and have been on his guard. With such a watchman, who could marvel that the great enemy of mankind made inroads on the flock? It was no wonder that, under such influence, Ashgrave had grown indifferent to things holy. It was no wonder, but just what he should have foreseen, that he should desecrate the

Sabbath by attending this heathenish mass with the Canadian.

He felt the personal in these failures, where he would have sunk it in successes. It was God who gave the increase and to whom praise was due, but the only price he asked was faithfulness and faith on the part of His servants. Failure meant that these were wanting. Hence it followed that eternal justice demanded that the burden of failure should be borne by the creature, though he might lay no claim to the glory of success. He had taken upon himself the responsibility of a shepherd of the people, and had failed to protect his flock against the ravening wolves.

As he ran back in his mind the events of the last year, his work lay before him a lifeless mass, wanting the living force of faith. He contrasted it sharply with the high purpose with which he had assumed his office. He made the prick of his failure the goad of his self-estimate, and found his fidelity so important that, lacking it, God was compelled to new arrangements in the economy of salvation. The unconscious tribute he paid to the ability of the devil was the measure of his fear of the poignancy in his parish of a single Papist.

Ashgrave had buried his isolation in the companionship of Henri and hard work, excepting when he broke the bonds of restraint in scenes of excess and debauchery that frightened men of weaker passions and grosser instincts, like Bill Holden and Si Patterson. Then for days together he left the farm to the boy, coming back only when physical and mental passions were satiated, and his companions of evil had abandoned him in wonder and fear.

At these times, the very terror of the wrong he dared was the spur of his excesses, and his unshaken conviction

of retribution that would exact the final farthing of payment gave the challenge to daring that horrified lesser men. Strong of body, with a vitality that had proved thus far inexhaustible, his passions, when they assumed control, knew no limit save satiety.

He returned to the farm as a shelter, and there he found Henri, patient, hard-working and cheerful. The work of the farm was done as thoroughly and completely as when Ashgrave himself was there, and by no word or sign did the other ever complain of his absence or the heavier work laid upon him.

Craig came upon Henri at his work near the lower end of the farm, and had from him respectful and almost eager greeting. He was no recluse in disposition. There was in him a love of companionship that woke at the first signal and flashed his good will to the world. Craig, who had scarcely seen the man before, noted these facts and counted them as a part of the cloud of his abomination and, though honestly intent to follow the steps of the Christ, found no good in his fellow. He barely returned the greeting, but burst out upon him:

"How dared you come into this parish? What place have you in a Christian community? You have done evil in the sight of the Lord, you are an abomination to the children of righteousness. You have forsaken the commandments of the Lord and thrice accursed are you in His sight. Therefore He will cast you out, He will spew you out of His mouth, and you shall be spewed out! I warn you to leave this parish at once. Get you to your kind and kindred; betake yourself to your father the devil, and in the name of the Lord I cast you forth!"

"Come, come, parson," interrupted Ashgrave, who had been saved from anger at the tirade by something in the irate clergyman and the dumbfounded Henri that

appealed to a strain of dark humour in him; "ain't you a little hard on poor Henri for taking his Christianity as he got it from his folks?"

Craig wheeled and faced the interloper.

"So you have n't the grace to hide your head," he sneered. "You dare stand forth and say that without a blush!"

"Seeing's I'm on my own ground, I guess I can make a try at it." Ashgrave kept up his good humour. "As for blushing — it ain't in my line, an' I guess I've clean forgotten how."

"And you brought this — this — mass-mongering idolater here."

"Sorter sweet-scented names for a minister to use, ain't they, parson? If you want to know, I brought Henri here, and a mighty good day's work it was when I did it." He walked over and stood by the boy, resting his hand on his shoulder.

"And I bid you, in the Master's name, discharge him at once! He shall be cast out from the community; we will have no lot or part with him or his fellow idolaters."

"Would n't it be a good plan, parson, for you to mind your own business?" Ashgrave drawled.

"The souls of my people are a charge given into my hands by God," answered the clergyman. "I will not see them exposed to danger; I will not see them fall into the clutches of the Scarlet Woman, and not protest."

"Just protest all you want to," sneered Ashgrave, "but if I was you, I'd do it in private, with my door locked. Perhaps whoever sent you to attend to other folk's business, if he sees in private, will reward you openly. In the meantime, if you're real afraid for the souls of this community, you might try your hand at casting out the devils of close-fistedness, back-biting,

slandering, harlotry, drunkenness, and a few other such minor wickednesses, before you tackle the bigger job of getting rid of a quiet, clean-souled fellow, just because he worships God differently than you do. Perhaps you might hit me pretty hard along some of these lines, but you won't make much headway when you tackle me on Henri. And now, if you hain't got anything more to say," and his tone was ominous of coming wrath, "perhaps you 'll take yourself off my farm, or I may take a notion to help you."

"You 'll get rid of that fellow," answered the clergyman, pointing toward Henri, "or I 'll lay the matter before the brethren. I have been negligent, hoping that you might turn from the evil of your ways. I have let you remain in the church, though cut off from the communion. It has been weakness in the past. Now it must be as the brethren say."

"And tell the brethren from me, while you are about it, that they can go to hell, where most of 'em belong."

CHAPTER XXXV

BABYLON THE GREAT

IT WAS long since a sermon of such power had been preached in Padanaram pulpit as that which Simeon Craig preached the next Sabbath day morning from the text:

And upon her forehead was a name written *Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and Abomination of the Earth.*

And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.

He sketched rapidly, in homely language whose only ornament was the Biblical figures which were well nigh as much his own as his mother tongue, the long line of crimes with which the Roman Church stands charged at the bar of Protestant Christianity. The Israelitish bowing of the knee to Baal was the parallel of the image worship of the recreant church. Its forms and ceremonies, the magnificence of its churches and its priests could be alone meant by the words, "the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth." She was Rome, for does not St. John himself declare, "and the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones, and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornications."

Then came the long list of martyrs to the faith that had marked the Protestant Reformation. Luther's charges were rehearsed: the Inquisition was painted in

all its horrors, and Bloody Mary was dragged from her tomb in evidence that "the woman is drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus."

"Babylon the great is fallen," he cried, leaning from his pulpit toward the spell-bound congregation. "Babylon the great is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth!"

The very audacity of this as a preliminary to the declaration that the emissaries of the Scarlet Woman had stolen into their quiet community, saved that declaration from the weakness of absurdity to lift it to the importance of the great theme itself; and when he made it, his audience shuddered with horror in which there was no pretence, but rather the intense realisation of the imagery of evil he had been painting. So, too, when he again turned to the Bible imagery, no one doubted its ordained application to that actual moment.

Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins!

For her sins have reached unto heaven and God hath remembered her iniquities.

Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death and mourning and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire; for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her.

Rejoice over her, thou heaven: and ye holy apostles and prophets: for God hath avenged you on her!

There followed a silence during which even the breathing of the congregation seemed to cease, and then he leaned again toward them, with the final outcry:

Alas, alas, that great city, that was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold, and precious stones and pearls!

Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her according to her works.

Thus with violence shall that great city be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all!

After the preaching, there was a church meeting when he laid before the brethren the fact that Joseph Ashgrave was harbouring a Papist and that he had himself attended mass at Belmont. This was the sin of which he accused him, not his profanity, his drunkenness, his unchastity. Into this God-fearing Protestant community he had brought the child of another communion, knowingly placing in jeopardy the inheritance of faith which was theirs from England and the Reformation, and later from the Puritan movement, which in its greatness produced the Commonwealth and Cromwell, and in its littleness Salem and New England.

Peleg Singleton was for a church trial. It would bring people to the village and grist to his mill, and he waxed strong on the right of a man to be heard in his own behalf. "It's agin the principles of a free country fur eny man to be condemned unheerd," he asserted.

"Farm work's pressin'," Deacon Buffington objected, "an' we hain't got no time to waste. 'T ain't goin' to alter fac's to hear him talk, even ef he tuck the trouble to come, which I hain't guessin' he would. I don't see no need to take a week to weed a field when you kin do it in fifteen minutes."

Singleton opined that "so'thin' is due to the constitutional right o' harcus carcus," and, incidentally, to the interests of home trade as represented by his shop.

"I don't know nothin' erbout his carkis," retorted the deacon, "but ef 't ain't wuth no more 'n I guess it be, thar hain't no great shucks of a constitutional right consarned with it. I move the name of Joseph Ash-

grave be stricken off an' eradicated from the books o' this church forthwith and immediately, an' thet his church membership thereupon cease an' determine an' therea'ter stop."

"Lordy-massy," interposed Blanket, breaking through a cloud of admiring wonderers, "du you s'pose we kin du all that, an' du it jest by sayin' yes? It's kinder cu'rus the things that kin be done by jest votin'."

"You hear the motion," said the clergyman, with solemnity intended to hint his disapproval of Blanket's half-suspected levity. "Is the motion seconded?"

"Wall, I'll second it," Blanket declared, utterly oblivious to the implied rebuke. "It kinder seems like a big proposition, an' I do'nō but somebody ought tu help bear the heft on 't. P'haps you'll have somebody third it; I hain't hankerin' to carry half on't."

"It is moved and seconded that the name of Joseph Ashgrave be stricken from the church rolls for fostering and harbouring and abetting Papists, to the injury of the Church. Are you ready for the question?"

"I s'pose," said Blanket, "thet was the motion. P'raps I'm gettin' a little hard o' hearin'."

"If the brother desires to speak on the question," said Craig sternly, "we shall be glad to hear him, but I cannot permit this constant interruption of orderly proceedings."

"Do you call this ord'ly proceedin's," demanded Singleton, who saw his hope of a bargain day fading away, "tu turn a feller out without givin' him a chance tu say nothin'? Nex' thing you know somebody'll want tu be hangin' a man fust an' tryin' him a'terward. What's become of the paladin of our liberties, I'd like tu know?"

Seagrave rose. He was interesting as the father-

in-law of the culprit and his nearest neighbour. The brethren leaned forward eagerly to hear him.

"It kinder seems to me," he said, "'s ef we war spendin' more gab 'n the thing 's wuth. He 's kep' this Papist fur nigh half a year, an' we 've all seen him. Ef he hain' hurt nobody up to this time, it 's good luck, an' t ain't no sign he wont. We don't want him, an' we hain't goin' to hev him at large. I don't know how we 're goin' to get rid on him, but we 're goin' to, an' it stan's to reason that the fust thing to du is to punish the man that brought him here. Thet 's what we 've got in han' jest now, an' the man that wants to wait till Joe Ashgrave's hed a chance to say so'thin', would ax you to stop fur prars afore you killed a mad dog. Let 's turn Ashgrave out 'n the church. Thet 'll be one good job done. Then we 'll see what we 'll du about this here Papist, and that'll be another good job done. If thar 's anybody that wants a trial o' the critter, there 'll be plenty o' time a'terward. Jest now, we 've got so'thin' to du. Let 's du it."

"I 'm goin' to vote fur turnin' him out," Singleton declared in reply, " an' thar hain't nothin' he nor nobody else kin say that 'll stop me. He 's ben a tradin' for months over to Belmont, an' sech carryin's on an' this thing o' keepin' Papists on his farm an' goin' to mass hes got to be stopped. But I want the thing done in order an' in due regard for the proper an' judicious sequence of events. Ef Judge Bascom saw a man steal a hundred dollars, he could n't put him in jail fur doin' it, till he 'd tried him. He 'd know all the time he war goin' to send him thar, but he 'd know tu that he was goin' to do it accordin' to the constitutional paraphenalia's own system of jurisdiction. Thet 's all I want an' that's what I 'm going to stick fur."

"How air you goin' to know it when you see it?" demanded Blanket.

"The brother must not interrupt," the chairman-clergyman declared.

"I'm a official o' the United States Gov'ment," Singleton declared with disgust, "an' I would be violatin' of my oath to s'port the Constitution of the United States ef I permitted this denial of the sacred right o' harcus carkus to go without my protest. I 'm sartain he 's guilty, an' nothin' thet kin be said 'll change me; but I must hear the evidence."

"Get thet some other time," said Blanket. "Let 's vote now. We 're a burnin' daylight."

With the exception of Singleton, the vote was unanimous, and Ashgrave ceased to be a member of Padanaram Church. The thing which, a few months before, had startled him as a mere threat, thus became a fact, and the greatest disgrace that could be inflicted upon him, in the estimation of the community in which he lived, had come upon him. As the meeting broke up, many felt a weight of responsibility as of men who had pronounced sentence of spiritual death upon a fellow being. By the vote, Ashgrave had been cut off from their church membership and had become as a heathen and a stranger.

Other passions, however, had been stirred in the hearts of some — the passion of the beast that has tasted blood and thirsts for more. Blanket, who knew somewhat of the community in which he lived, scented trouble and made free to warn the clergyman. Craig scouted the idea. While Ashgrave had brought the Papist among them, aside from excommunication, spiritual punishment was all he had contemplated, and of this excommunication was simply the external sign and evidence.

"You kin start a fire an' mean tu stop with bresh, but
thet hain't goin' to save the woods when it catches 'em."

"What do you mean?" Craig demanded impatiently.

"I d' no. Ef I did, I would n't be half so scart."

"I've got no time to be frightened at shadows,"
retorted the clergyman, turning away.

"T ain't the shadders," said Blanket, "but what
makes 'em that I'm afeared of."

CHAPTER XXXVI

AMANDA AND BARNABY

WHEN Blanket drove up to the platform of the Junction station on the Wednesday morning succeeding the great sermon, there stood Barnaby, with the eager look of a boy on a vacation lighting his face. Slowly and in snatches the news of his having been found, and of his restoration to health, had come to Padanaram, but even that did not quite prepare Blanket for sight of the man himself, alive and, seemingly, as well as ever. Before Blanket could find his tongue, Barnaby called out:

"Is she the Widow Marlow still, Blanket, or has she consented?"

"She's a waitin'," answered Blanket, "fur leap-year."

"I'm ashamed of you, positively ashamed," said Barnaby, as he came forward and shook hands warmly with the stage driver. "It's almost a year, to my certain knowledge, that you've been talking of this thing."

"Wall," explained Blanket, "s'long's I du nothin' but talk, I've got things in my own han's. I sorter like the taste of freed'm."

"Chut! Chut! Chut! That's just what I'm ashamed of. I thought there was one man in Padanaram who could pay the price of loving."

There was something in the tone, light as it was, in which Barnaby spoke, that attracted even Blanket. It was only an attraction, however, and he come back unflinchingly to the bald facts of life.

"Wall, thar's two kin's of love; one when ye love the woman enough to merry her, an' to'ther when you love her too much to let her merry you. I hain't found out yet which kin' mine is."

"If you want her and she's willing," said Barnaby, "you'd better take her and let that question settle itself later."

"I'd hate all-fired to hev to pity my wife 'cause she'd married me."

"S'pose she'd married another fellow?" demanded Barnaby.

"Then I'd pity myself, an' that's kinder soothin' at times."

"Well, I don't want to be soothed at any such price as that," said Barnaby.

"Hain't thar some way you kin hev Ashgrave tuck up?" demanded Blanket, who first of all was after Barnaby's story.

Barnaby took a turn up and down the little platform, as if either he had no answer or did n't like the one he had. When he came back to where Blanket sat with patience equal to his horse's, the expression of his face did not please the stage driver.

"Suppose I did," he said slowly. "That would n't mend matters, and people would say I did it because he had won her."

"S'pose they did?"

"It would n't matter—if only I could be certain 't was n't true. But suppose I doubted my own motive?"

"Ye hain't got all over yer hurt hev you?" demanded Blanket, eyeing the other anxiously.

Barnaby gave an imitation of his old light laughter, and then stopped short as if, after all, it was not worth while.

"That depends on which you mean. My head's all right," he said.

"Goin' over with me this a'fternoon?" asked Blanket.

"No. I was at Augusta and ran up here just to see how 't would seem. There is n't enough in it to tempt me farther. Good-bye," and he held out his hand, only to add, when Blanket had grasped it, "If I were you, I'd marry her."

"Wall," said Blanket, "I'm thinkin' ser'ous erbout it, but it's one o' them thin's you don't want to hurry too much in."

None the less, a half hour later, Barnaby was on the road to Padanaram, in a light buggy with a boy for a driver, who tried in vain to make him talk. Before they reached the village, he directed the driver to cross to the Belmont road, and later to leave him about half a mile from the Seagrave farm. The boy went back to the Junction fully satisfied that his passenger was either crazy or a fool.

Barnaby found the fields wet and miry, but at last reached the road that led from Seagrave's farm toward the sugar camp and passed Ashgrave's. Here, under a clump of kalmia, that was showing the green of new leaf-buds and the clustered dots that would by and by burst into white and pink cups, he found the rock where they had sat that day, which it was hard to place in his reconstructed almanac, and where she had promised to become his wife. His best measure of the passage of time since then was the fact that she had married Ashgrave.

He did not know whether he expected or wished to meet her. He had come with no definite purpose. Finding himself at Augusta, he had come to the Junction. Once there, the visit to Padanaram, and to this spot in

Padanaram, became unavoidable. He saw that now, though he had spoken honestly to Blanket when he said there was nothing to tempt him farther.

He looked up at a rustle of dry grass, or the brushing of a bough, and she stood in the road facing him. Her white face and sad eyes told him that she had seen him already. Her figure, less upright than of old, a certain hollowness of the cheek and the drawn lips across the teeth, told him that she had suffered. He came down and stood beside her, his hand in hers, before either of them spoke. Then it was she who first found words.

"Oh," she cried, "why, why did you come?"

"I did n't," he said. "I was drawn here, meaning all the time to go away."

She saw in his look, and heard in his tones, the pain he tried to conceal, and her pity rushed out to him, in place of that pity for herself which should make her cold and distant. It was womanly gentleness that won, where she meant that womanly right should shield her.

"At least," she said, softly, "I can see, for myself, that you are well again, and tell you in my own words how glad I am."

"I am not well," he said, almost roughly, "and I want no one to be glad on my account, least of all; you."

She smiled at his brusqueness; a smile so full of sadness that he felt that nothing but a smile could have expressed it all.

"Would you refuse me even that little shred of joy?" she asked.

He started, as if he would clasp her in his arms, then plunged his hands deep in his pockets and spoke more gently than he had yet done:

"God knows I would refuse you nothing that can

bring you the faintest bit of happiness. I don't think you have more of it than I."

"But why have you come?" she asked.

"To know from yourself that after your promise to me, you have actually married that brute." He had not meant to use the word, but after all it was so much less than the fact itself that it did not seem to matter.

"Yes," she said, "I have married him. It was the right thing. What was wrong was to have promised you. I am sorry I wronged you by doing so."

"If you believe it was wrong," he answered sharply, "if you can think for an instant that it was not right above all things and everything, then it was wrong and I have been — deceived."

"You have been deceived," she said, as if his word had been a relief and had given her the power to say what she was holding back. "I could not make you the promise I did. It was sacrilege. It was a wrong to you. It was wicked."

"That is, you did not love me?" He stood over her asking the question as on that day that seemed so long ago, and asking it, as then, as if he would have answer.

"Oh don't!" she cried, covering her face with her hands.

"But I will!" he exclaimed. "I have gone through many things; I have come thus far; I will have an answer! You did not love me?"

She looked in his eyes for an instant, and in that look was accusation of cruelty such as Ashgrave's brutality had never equaled. She pleaded for pity, and found him as pitiless as was Ashgrave that fatal day. Two men's cruelty had she known, and of the two this man's was the deepest. She covered her face again, and the tears which were not in her eyes were in her voice.

"I loved you a hundred times more than I told you!"

"Then," he answered positively, "you had the right, and the wickedness was in marrying another."

"But, Francis," she said, using his name as she had rarely done, "I had to!"

"No," he said, "you could n't have to. You were promised to me and you loved me."

"But that terrible thing!"

"There can be no terrible thing, excepting separation, for two who love each other," he said. "That was all I asked, to have you, and you promised!"

"But God would not suffer it."

"Then God is not God," he answered.

"He would not suffer it." So she came back to that first assertion. "He took you away, and did not let you return till I had confessed and it was too late."

"But it is n't too late," he protested. "I am here now and you love me. It is n't too late."

"But I am married," she repeated, half believing he had not understood.

He laughed, not pleasantly, but as suggesting that there was nothing in that to counter what he had said.

"I'm not likely to forget," he answered. "But that does n't make it too late."

"Ah," she said. "I understand now. You think, because I have been wrong once, I am bad."

She turned from him toward home, but not too quickly for him to see in her eyes a look he had never thought to have turned on him; a look in which he read immeasurable sorrow, heart-breaking reproach and chastened love. The most finished coquette could have given no look so powerful to attract. He sprang to her side and stopped her, stung to the heart by the word "bad."

"No, no, no!" he cried. "I don't mean that! I

mean anything but that. You married him for the sake of others, forgetting me and remembering them; but you love me, and that marriage is no marriage. It can't stand between us; it shan't stand between us! It is nothing, nothing, less than nothing where love is concerned. There must be a way; there shall be a way!"

"I am married," she repeated, and as a finality. "A marriage is a marriage. There is no way." As he seemed about to speak again, she added, "I want no way."

That brought him sharply to himself with a suddenness of surprise that for the instant aped calmness.

"You want no way?" he repeated.

"No," she said. "I have sinned, and God has laid on me my punishment. I do not ask, I do not want to escape it."

"But I," he cried, "have n't sinned! Why am I punished? That you may have your punishment, must I live in hell, and without you?"

The all-absorbing selfishness of thwarted love made him dead to the fearful cruelty of his answer, which was to her a blow struck by a hand to which she had appealed for protection. She grew white with the pain of it, and hid her eyes that he might not see.

"God in His own good time will give you recompense," she said.

"And God may take it back. I want you!"

"Francis," she said, laying her hand on his arm, "when God says 'no,' that is the end."

"Yes, of God," he cried, "but not of my love."

He seized her in his arms and pressed her to him, as he had done that other day, when she owned her love. Frightened, not alone of him, but also of herself, she cried out for release, and struggled till he freed her. He

stood, half shamed of his act, yet glad. She trembled, with knowledge of herself, such as came to our first parents in the Garden.

"You must go away," she said.

"Must!" He laughed at the folly of the word.

"Yes," she said, "must, and at once."

"And if I don't?"

"I shall go and live with my husband."

CHAPTER XXXVII

ASHGRAVE CLAIMS HIS OWN

DURING the three days which followed the Sunday of the sermon against the Roman Church, there were ominous growlings and mutterings when men met and stopped for a minute's chat. Fear was heavy upon them, and the heavier because they had always before thought of the Roman power, if they thought of it at all, as a distant, intangible something that was a plague and a menace for a great many years, but had ceased to be of much account since an indefinite something, named the Reformation, occurred.

Now suddenly it lowered portentous, a very miracle of danger, striking boldly at the church in Padanaram itself!

The whisper went abroad that the Papist must go. That was the very least that an outraged community could demand; but that must be demanded sharply and imperatively, to the end that there should be no mistaking the meaning.

As dusk fell, a group of half-grown boys gathered in front of the post office, with low whisperings among themselves, as if to hide their purpose even while making it known. They moved toward the cross-road that led to Ashgrave's farm, and here a boy and there a man, drawn by some silent summons that filled the air, swelled the number. Bill Holden and Si Patterson developed out of the distances, and learned with horror of the menace to the Protestant faith, a menace the more

startling because their intimacy with Ashgrave had made them almost, although innocently, abettors therein. There were nearly fifty in the throng when, from the hilltop, they caught sight of the farmhouse, lonely in the vast expanse of the night. A cry burst from them; the cry of the hunting pack when in sight of the quarry.

The tumult of his wild blood was awake in Ashgrave again that night. Under it was a cry for companionship that life had not given him. The Canadian boy had been a godsend, but there is a hunger in man that man may not supply. There is something in this deeper than the mere cry of animal lust. It is not sin, even, unless nature be sin.

Others had laughed at his love for Amanda Seagrave, but he never had. He had scouted it; shut his heart to it; betrayed it; done everything save laugh; and it had come to him that of all things that had entered into or gone out of his life, this had least in it to call for laughter. Without it, life was hopelessly empty. With it, it seemed almost possible that even he might make something of life.

All day long at the heavy work, which never tired him, he had striven for self-analysis, which was always wearisome. His tremendous physical strength craved labour, as his stomach craved food, and he found absolute physical pleasure in the mere fact of doing, irrespective of its results. As a man of less vitality, failing to understand this craving and the joy of gratification, might also have failed to believe, so a man of lesser passions must have failed to understand the terrible tide of lust which, at its flood, was dominant beyond denial. Out of the laboratory of time he had been turned, master of labour and procreation, and nature is no such bungler as not to leave the man better, physically, in the fulfilment of his functions.

Could he compass life within this fulfilment and the relationships which it involved? Dim in the morning of days lay the faint memory of maternal love and the darkness of the terror of that night which had robbed him at once of mother and father. He had not consciously found the years of isolation which followed so terrible, perhaps because in him the greatness of experience replaced the boy's need of companionship before maturing functions awakened the demands of manhood. At least his life had given him development of his great frame under healthful labour that, for the time, seemed to meet all needs.

And yet — all self-analysis led, like a hidden, crooked path, to this "yet." From his father and mother each he had inherited something more than this great body, instinct with the desire to toil and to reproduce itself, or he might have been happy in toil and reproduction. Out of some early experience his father had brought across the waste shreds and tatters of a broader taste of life than his fellows, one evidence of which was a small collection of books strange to this practical community, which had been the companions of many a long evening passed in the company of his half-demented father. These too, as well as this long isolation, his superb bodily health had taken to itself, less as poison than food; yet they had stirred to life something that had called and not been answered, or at least so little answered as to seem the echo of its own call or the laugh of mocking Tantalus.

In his ignorance, he sought answer from the most earthly of associations into which awakening hunger plunged him in his unguided adolescence; but he had sought it as well from the church, the visible centre about which the life of his community circled and which was never, in its organised entity, long silent in any of

the affairs of life. Then, the first whisper came in the dance of a girl's laughing eyes and the music of a girl's laughing voice, and he dreamed that he had found the secret good that lay at the heart of life.

It seemed to him to-day that he had not been wrong in holding that this awaking was of that which had remained unstirred of all his other experiences, and that it would have remained on an entirely different plane, had not accident come as the handmaid of anger, and, perhaps, jealousy, to toss it into the arena to be ravened by passion and despoiled of lust.

It would have been held a sign of non-regeneration by his associates that he looked at his act, not from the standpoint of a wrong committed, but as of a loss sustained. It was through her eyes he had caught his first glimpse of a world to which he also had believed himself heir, and by one wanton act his inheritance was lost. There had never been a moment when he did not clearly mark the difference in his relation to her and to other women, and surely she owed something to it that when he had urged marriage she held herself back, until opportunity, coupled with temptation, came to the begetting of disaster. Had she no part in this? Did it lay obligation on him alone? He forgot that she had offered herself, and he had refused. He remembered only that he was denied. At the fast-locked door he stood, whose hands had turned the bolt and thrown away the key.

With the indirectness of a countryman, who goes at no enterprise by a straight road when another can be found, Ashgrave strolled into the Seagrave barn and stood watching the boys and the hired man at their chores. The swinging lantern gave a circle of light in the mist of shadows, out of which a grunt of recognition did duty for

greeting. Then a running fire of question and answer rose and fell, with intervals of silence. The weather was discussed and, as always, pronounced of the worst. The hay was running low, with the chance of necessity to buy, if the spring feeding was late. The lambs were not as promising as they ought to be, and the wool was going to be light. All the while, the boys were rushing through their work, with the purpose of slipping away, without returning to the house, and of joining the throng that was making its way up the cross-road. Finally, Ashgrave made a pass at the purpose of his call.

"'Mandy in?'" he asked, nodding toward the house.

"Um — um," assented a grunt from the dark.

"Father and mother?"

"Um — um."

"Won't you slip in and tell her I want to see her?'"

"Much 's my life 'd be wuth," answered Tom. "Ma'd give me tophet."

"Guess I've got a right to speak to my wife," returned Ashgrave, his quick anger stirring at the refusal.

"Then I'd do it, 'stead o' hangin' round the barn," said Bill, and both boys giggled.

Their work was done and they were ready to give their visitor the slip.

The laugh, more than the words, stung Ashgrave, who turned without a word and, marching to the door, gave a loud rap. The door flung open and showed Seagrave himself.

"I want to see 'Mandy,'" announced the husband.

"Hush!" whispered the other. "Don't speak so loud. She's thar;" nodding toward the kitchen. "I'll fetch her."

He tiptoed away, and Ashgrave waited impatiently

and still apprehensively. He had thought his errand easy. It was growing momently impossible. The rustle of his wife's dress, as she came to him, sent a strange thrill through him and made him catch his breath. She came without a flutter of her heart. Save for memory of Barnaby, she had grown indifferent to the anomaly of her position. She had no greeting for him, but simply waited his purpose.

Her outline against the dark of the door, which she closed, was a challenge to his right. He half reached his hand to touch her, and then drew it back. Her very silence daunted him and robbed him of the courage of his errand. She moved impatiently under his prolonged silence. At last, strong with a sense of shame that he should have no tongue to demand his own, he threw his preshaped plans to the winds, and blurted out:

"I want you to come home with me!"

Whatever she had guessed his errand, she had not guessed this, and surprise startled her. She had offered herself to him, as the price of a marriage that was her right, and he had made his own condition, which she had faithfully abided. The question of right had ceased between them and was hers alone.

"It's too late to open that," she said coldly.

"It is n't too late to open it," he retorted, still instinctively holding his tone low in deference to the caution each felt: "and if it was, I'd open it all the same."

"You had your chance and threw it away once for all."

"I've something to say on that," he asserted. "You refused once, but that don't prevent your coming back."

"I offered myself as the price of honour," she said bitterly, "and you named your own terms. I stand by the bargain I made."

"Yes," he said, "that was easy for you. You did n't love."

She laughed, unpleasantly.

"You had a nice way of showing your love."

"Still, I loved."

"And I gave all for love, and still did n't get it." She had not exchanged a dozen words with him since their marriage, and her heart was eager to tell her wrongs, only her tongue was slow.

"I 've come to offer reparation."

"You 've come to demand reward!"

What manner of contradictory being was this, he asked of himself, who had insisted on living with him, marriage or no marriage, and now, when he had given her marriage, held him to a condition which, inasmuch as he had made it, he had a right to discard? She held him bound, yet was to be free herself from bonds!

His knowledge of women was in their surrender, food to his undisciplined volition toward masterhood. Their very wilfulness was invitation to control, to which strength was its own credential. This woman was his, not alone by the right of convention, but as well by right of strength; strength of will, of passion and of body. She had need of him, as the weaker has need of the stronger always, and his mastery was her right in submission as it was his in activity.

"Have it as you will," he said. "At least, I 've come."

"And at most, you 'll go."

"Not without you." His note became dominant, changing from pleading, and she felt the sense of masterhood in it. It startled and yet attracted. Again, as once before, she felt it possible for him to conquer.

"If I leave you and go into the house?" She was not without a disposition to play with the danger that

threatened her. At least, here was a break in the dull succession of suppressions of the last seven months, and here was one who saw her as worth more than mere toleration. She even comprehended that it would not be wholly revolting to be compelled to yield to force.

"I should follow and take you from there."

"They wouldn't let you," she said sharply.

"They don't want you; I do." He did not need to add, "and I shall take you." It was in the tone.

"You were to let me alone," she said feebly.

"I have; but I'm through with that. You're going with me now. It's better to go without any fuss, but if you want one, all right. 'T won't do any good."

"And if I don't go?"

"Then I'll carry you, this way." He seized her in his arms and lifted her like a child. A passion to cover her face, which was on a level with his own, with kisses, swept over him, but he forced it back with the same quiet mastery with which he had held his anger in check. He turned from the door, toward the roadway leading to the Ashgrave farm. She gasped under the suddenness of the action, and the conviction that he meant all that he had said.

"Wait!" she exclaimed. "I can't go this way!"

"Why not? I can carry you the whole distance. I don't believe you weigh a hundred pounds." A sense of lightness held him, and he wanted to laugh at the ease of his victory. She had resisted sufficiently to make resistance a spur to his desire, to make him feel that he was not a conqueror by mere default, and yet not so as to show that bitterness of antipathy which he would have known capable of stinging when the force of his present impulse slackened. He saw something more than submission — the possibility of real congeniality.

"But I must get some things. It's nothing but a man's barn, that house of yours. And I must tell father. You let me down and wait here."

"Not much!" he almost laughed with the strange joyousness that powered him. "I've got the upper hold now. I'm not trusting you out of my sight till I get you home."

Again there came to her, even as when Barnaby claimed her, that sense of being held in value by some one, even this brute of a man who had twice repulsed her and now held her by strength of superior muscle. She had become of importance, and in joy of that knowledge she shut herself absolutely from analysis. So she hoped to deceive herself, even for a little moment, yet none the less suspecting something of the sharp self-condemnation that would come when she faced the truth.

"I'll come back," she said, struggling for release. "It'll take me only a moment."

Her struggles in his arms, and the warm pressure of her body against his, sent the blood surging to his brain. The instinctive tightening of his hold brought her face close to his. One moment he held back, and then his lips fastened to hers in a long kiss which he had vowed to deny himself until they were in what was to be their home.

She felt her face pale as he dropped her to her feet. Her surrender was far short of all this kiss told and demanded, and for the moment she felt a revulsion that was almost denial. Yet she knew that she had hoped only for postponement.

"You might have waited," she said.

"I might," he laughed "but I couldn't. Besides, I've waited seven months."

They went back together and presented themselves to her astounded parents. Farmer Seagrave's hostility to the lad was lessened, as always, by his admiration for Ashgrave's great body and splended vigour. A mild sort of a giant himself, he had always felt that but for the other's devil of a temper, they might be good friends. The mother let her bitterness be heard.

"I allus knowed 't would come to this. When a man 's got the power, he don't let a woman alone fur long."

Amanda was pale, and the tide of excitement was making to its ebb. But the strong sense, the growth of generations, that marriage meant possession, came to sustain the weakening of that strange joy she had felt in his assertion that he wanted her, and she stood firm to her promise.

"After all, he is my husband," she said.

"Yes, 'cause he could 'nt help himself," snapped the mother. "You 're the fust gal in my family ever hed to marry a man."

"Come, come, mother," interposed Seagrave, a little alarmed at evidences that his son-in-law was not disposed to let matters go too far, "it 's the right thing, a'ter all. A woman's place is her husband's house, an' it'll be better for us all, I guess. Folks 'll forget sooner."

"Thet won't help thar bein' so'thin' to forget," grumbled Mrs. Seagrave.

It needed, perhaps, just this strain of fault finding to nerve Amanda to the sacrifice she was making, by showing her the barrenness of what was. Surely there could be no worse to come, excepting in so far as there was worse in giving herself the solace of love, which counted for little, practically, in the light of all she had guessed of married life from the men and women among whom she had lived.

She and Ashgrave passed on to her chamber. She would have forbid him, had she not felt a little pity for him, born of her mother's querulous complaints. So she let him go, and each was struck with a strange shyness as they stood in the doorway of the little white chamber. Almost for the first time, he peeped into a nest that had been the abode of maiden purity and hope, and there was a dim, stirring sense, in a clumsy, masculine way, of his share in the desecration of this purity and whiteness. He felt too, as perhaps he could not without a glimpse into what had been an outgrowth of her maidenhood, the difference between her and other women to whom he had been drawn, and this, for him, had in it that which was virile to purify and hallow their future from the depth of grossness to which it was capable of descending.

But for her, too, there was a note in this original whiteness, sharply contrastive with his huge bulk, so instinct with masculinity, that made for question and final shame. She was sorry she had let him come thus far, for it seemed as if he was looking into the depths of her being, before he had earned the right, even if it could be that another might ever earn such right. She had a sense that until this moment, in spite of sin, she had clung to some part of virginhood and that now she fell again, in complete despoilment.

When they left the house again, the mother flung after them a taunt, but Seagrave himself awaited them at the opening of the lane.

"I 'm glad on it," he said, roughly, speaking as a man who has thoughts, but is not accustomed to give them tongue. "'T other way never did seem right tu me. A day hain't got to be all wrong, 'cause it starts wrong. I hain't never quite liked you, Joe, an' I don't say that

I 'll get over it, but you jest behave yourself an' treat the gal right, an' ef thar's ever enything I kin du to help you, you need n't be afeerd to call on me to du it."

Amanda threw her arms around his neck and kissed him. It was the first time she had done it for many a year, but somehow it seemed to give a human touch to the affair that was wanting before. Ashgrave felt this, and even had a glimpse of the need of some every-day wearing quality to the fabric of their life, that would stand usage after the gloss of passion had worn off.

"Whatever else I 've done or hain't done, farmer," he said, "I 've loved 'Mandy and nobody else. If she 'll give me a little love an' bear up with my contraptions, I guess we 'll make a go of it as good as most folks."

With this epithalamium they dipped into the darkness of the sunken path and hurried toward the farm.

When they came to the higher land again, a confused murmur opened on their ears, which grew louder and more strenuous. Through it voices broke, and at times shouts. They heard calls as of angry men, and then a cheer that sounded like a menace, coming from the throats of a throng of people.

"For God's sake, what 's that?" demanded Ashgrave, struck with sudden apprehension.

Seizing her by the waist and almost carrying her, he sped across the fields toward the house.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE MOB AT THE FARM

HENRI'S sleep before the kitchen fire was broken by the sound of distant shouting which, recurring at intervals, seemed each time more near, breaking on the complete stillness that usually hung over the farm, with startling insistence.

He raised a window, and the shouts were louder and, seemingly, fell into words. The next time they burst out the words came clear and sharp:

"Down with the Papist! Death to Rome! Babylon is fallen! Down with the Mother of Harlots! Down with the Papist!"

Many of the words were strange to his imperfect knowledge of English, but he had not forgotten the "Papist," spoken by Craig. A sudden sense of coming evil assailed him. There was not much of the fighter in his nature, and he wished that Ashgrave was at home.

Presently the shouting came from the space between the barn and the house, which was filled with men and boys:

"The Papist! The Papist! Down with him! Trot him out! Give him a taste of Queen Mary!"

He cowered in the far corner of the room, filled with cowardly forebodings, dreading, he knew not what, hoping that Ashgrave would come.

There was a pounding at the doors and the call of men insistent upon entry. He had put the light out, but they had seen it as they came down the hill-road and called their knowledge.

"It's all right. You're thar all the same. Turn out the Papist. Babylon, Babylon, Babylon has fallen. Give us a look at him! Trot him out o' town! Tar and feather him! Ride him on a rail! Down with the Papist!"

Some began to throw stones at the house, and now and then one came through the window and rattled across the floor, frightening still more the crouching boy.

There was a lull in the noise that gave a new turn to his fear; for he felt that they were consulting and would devise some way to get at him. He crept to the doors and made sure again of their fastenings.

The din and shouts rose anew, and a great rock was hurled against the door with a force that shook the house. There was a call for axes to break down the doors, and he heard them searching the woodshed. A stone was hurled through a window, carrying away half the upper sash. The fury and anger of the mob, which was not yet sufficient for close work, were growing with the heat of exercise and the encouragement of their shoutings.

Behind the cellar door sounded a step, which brought a smothered scream from the boy as the door flew open. Someone stood in the kitchen darkness and Ashgrave's voice bellowed out:

"What in hell does this mean? Henri, give us a light, quick! Has hell broken loose?"

"The windows are broken," whispered Henri, too frightened to speak aloud, "they'll see us if we light a lamp."

"I'm not afraid to be seen in my own house," shouted Ashgrave. "Give us a light."

Henri obeyed, and saw Ashgrave standing, red and angry, with Amanda clinging to him frightened and trembling. They had come by the cellar-way from the barn.

That the light was seen by the crowd as well, was evidenced by the renewed tumult, and a well-aimed stone came through the window and passing within an inch of Henri's head, struck Ashgrave on the arm. He sprang to the stairway and carried, rather than led, Amanda to the upper floor. When he returned, the room was again in darkness. Another stone had struck over the candle, and the shouting outside was redoubled.

"Go upstairs," he said sharply. "I'll deal with the gang."

He felt, rather than heard, the boy's objection, and spoke almost gently, as he repeated the order:

"You're afraid," he added. "You can't help it; but nobody who's afraid is going to be any good here."

Ashgrave lighted two candles and set them on the table near the broken windows. He moved with a quiet method that surprised himself to a knowledge of his conception of the seriousness of the situation. Anger, the mere temporary passion of a sudden offence, was wanting, and he found himself facing the affair as if it had nothing of personal weight. As his form appeared before the windows, a louder yell went up from the mob and through it he heard the demand:

"The Canuck! Turn out the Canuck! Give us the Papist! Down with Rome!"

He raised the window, and a silence fell on the mass waiting for him to speak. His voice came clear and without a tremor:

"What does this mean? What right have you to destroy my house and property?"

He paused, and instantly a babel of voices took up the cry, demanding the boy and denouncing Popery. He held up his hand and they stopped again to hear him.

"I can't tell a word you're saying. Let Buck Miller

there come forward and tell me, while the rest of you hold your tongues."

Buck Miller, thus singled out, slunk into the rear of the crowd. He had a sense that it might sometime go hard with somebody if Ashgrave should care to make reprisals, and he did not relish notoriety. But the crowd was not to be denied, and took up the yell:

"Tell him Buck. Stand up like a man an' tell him," and a lane was opened through which he was forced.

He stood out, tall and lank, shuffling his feet and twisting his hands, and mouthed his message:

"The pahson ses, es this Canuck feller thet works fur you 's a Papist."

At this the crowd set up a yell, and Ashgrave had to stop them before Miller could go on. He was fighting for time, partly because he thought at the worst help must come, and partly because he saw that it would take skill and shrewdness to save his property, and in this he knew delay to be on his side.

"The pahson, he ses, a Papist is a son of a harlot, an' thet we must drive him out. He ses we 'll all go to hell, ef we don't. Ye hain't got no more right to bring a Papist into town 'n you hev to bring the hoof-pest or glanders. We hain't goin' to hev it, an' we want ye to turn him over to us, an' we 'll chuck him into the hoss-pond or du su'thin' with him. We hain't goin' to hev no sons o' harlots here, an' we hain't going to hev religion spiled by no sech things as Papists!"

He had waxed bold toward the last, and his final words, delivered in the tone of an ultimatum, were greeted with a loud yell of approbation. Then the mob waited to hear Ashgrave, observant of the rights which town-meeting had taught them.

"So you 're after Henri, are you?" he asked.

"Yas, an' we're goin' to hev him. Pitch him out, we'll 'tend to him!"

"But he's my hired man."

"Git another! You hain't no right to hire Papists."

"He works for me and has just as much right here as you have — more'n you've got on my farm."

"You're a liar!" came from the back of the crowd, and a stone was thrown, hitting the house.

"I've a right to hire whom I please on my farm," went on Ashgrave, setting his teeth hard against the anger within him, which reared its head and threatened discomfiture. "He's a quiet, civil, hard-working fellow, honest as the day and decent to everybody."

"He's a Papist; he's from Rome; he's a heathen; he wants to destroy the Protestants;" the yells came from the crowd, right and left.

"He lives here and he'll stay here," retorted Ashgrave. "Nobody but a coward would turn him over to a gang like you."

A perfect pandemonium burst forth at this, and stones were hurled against the house, some of which went through the windows, one or two striking Ashgrave himself. He stood looking at them waiting for silence, feeling the terror of the girl whom he had brought to this outbreak of hell, and planning some way to provide for her safety.

When the tumult subsided a little, he again raised his hand, which was a signal they obeyed.

"Is this all you want — the Canuck?"

"Yas! Turn him out an' we'll go away. The Canuck! the Canuck! give us the 'tarnal critter."

"Well, you can't have him." Ashgrave spoke slowly so that every one heard his full words. "He's my man, and here he stays. This is my house and my farm and

you 're trespassers. You 'll have to kill me before you touch a hair of his, and before that, somebody 'll get hurt. Now I order you to get off this farm and get off quick. I 've heard you, and I 've got only one thing to say, and that is get, and get quick."

Rage and defiance were in the yell that greeted this declaration. He felt the difference to all previous demonstrations. In those there had been, in spite of the underlying purpose, something of a disposition to levity; now it was pure rage and beastly anger that rang out. Even the stones that were thrown seemed to come with a greater force. He turned again to still them, but had lost control, and they simply yelled anew as he raised his hand.

Then some one shouted:

"We 'll take him then!" and there was a rush bodily for the house.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE ATTACK ON THE HOUSE

A SHGRAVE had foreseen and provided for this possibility. At the first movement, he reached down and, seizing a musket which stood by the window, leveled it at them. The foremost men and boys came to a dead halt, and the rearward ones piled upon them in their headlong haste. A sudden silence fell on the throng. Ashgrave seized the opportunity to speak again, still keeping his musket at shoulder.

"I'm not saying anything," he said, "but you know whether I can shoot. The law gives me the right to defend my house, and if it did n't, I'd defend it all the same. Are Tom and Frank Seagrave in that crowd?"

No one answered in words, but the turning of many heads told him what he wanted to know.

"I want them to come here."

There was an evident attempt to push them forward, and as evident a purpose on their part to hold back. Even muttered words of refusal could be heard.

"I want to say something to them," Ashgrave said quietly. "I'll not touch them, and I'll let them go again; but I must speak with them."

"Don't you do it!" somebody shouted. "He's just gaffin' you;" and at this yell broke out anew and a few stones were thrown, but the crowd kept at a respectful distance from the steadily pointed musket.

Matters were now at a tension which it was impossible to maintain, and Ashgrave again turned to the question

of getting Amanda out of the house. He had intended boldly to put her in her brother's hands, but now he dared not let the mob know she was there. He had seen among the faces Bill Holden's and Si Patterson's, and knew too well the principle of their lives and that of others to trust a woman to their madness, especially a woman who had in her past the history of one false step.

He was confident that Henri was crouching at the bottom of the stairs, and without daring to leave his post at the window, he spoke sharply his name, relying on his instinct of obedience.

He quickly realised, however, that his voice was lost in the babel. He was asking himself whether he could dart to the stair door and open it, and return in time to check the rush which would follow his movement, when a sudden note in the yellings of the mob told him that something new was on foot, and that that something pleased his assailants wonderfully.

The cries rose sharper and more triumphant, and out of the deeper darkness came a throng of men and boys each having in front of him a great bunch of hay or straw which he held between him and the house. There was a moment's consultation, and then one part of the throng rushed for the main door and the other for the side door. They came from opposite sides and not in face of the musket, and before he could act, they were out of line, running along the side of the house or the woodshed.

Before he fully realised their purpose, the bundles had been dropped, one mass at the one door, the other at the other, and a new throng of men was coming with another mass of hay and straw. He leaned forward to catch their purpose, and suddenly there shot up on

either hand a tongue of flame. Then, with a quick leap, came a roar of fire through straw and hay as dry as tinder. A wall of fire was blazing before each door! A steady stream of men and boys was already at work under its protection, piling new combustibles on to the flames.

Careless now of consequences, Ashgrave leaped back and threw open the door to the stairway. There, as he expected, crouched Henri, white with terror, but looking to him for directions and safety, as a dog looks to its master. He spoke with firmness to carry all possible weight of command:

"Crawl along the wall to the cellar door. Go through the cellar to the barn and get the horses and cattle into the back pasture. Be quick while they are busy with the fire."

He was back again at the window, from which he had not been missed. The flames were already catching the shingles of the low roof and licking, like tongues, the clapboards; catching, then dying out, then catching again with a stronger hold. He heard men behind the house, where they were stationed apparently to prevent escape in that direction. The way through the cellar was their only salvation.

Even amid the tumult, he heard a step on the stair and the rustle of a gown —the first token of his wife in their home! Without turning his head he said distinctly:

"Wait. They don't know you're here. They musn't see you. You must get away."

"And you?" There was a touch of softness and anxiety in the tone that made his heart leap.

"I too, of course; but not till the last moment. You know the way through the cellar. Crawl to the cellar door, go to the barn, and help Henri get the horses and cattle out."

"And leave you here?" Yes, it was so! His heart beat as it had not under the stress of desire.

"They must n't guess. The house is gone and nothing can save the barn. We'll have nothing but the land and stock. We must save that."

There was a sob now.

"Oh Joe, give me one kiss before I go. I 'm so sorry."

That made the blood rush from his heart, and for the first time since the assault began, he nearly lost his head. The hot breath of the flames was licking at him through the windows, but that was nothing. He must have that kiss, come what would of it; but it should not endanger her.

"When you are on the cellar landing." He stood without turning, till there came her soft "Now."

He darted to the cellar, clasped her in his arms and took the kiss. Then he shut the door and turned softly the key, so that she should not hear. If he had dared leave his post, he would have fastened the door from the passage to the barn. At least he would do all in his power to prevent her return.

Then he took his place at the window again, determined to make show of defiance to the last moment possible, as the best means of giving time to save the stock and enable Amanda and the boy to escape.

CHAPTER XL

BLANKET INTERFERES

BLANKET had wandered round in the early evening like a restless spirit. He was not of an assertive disposition, and the repulse he had received from the clergyman on Sunday did not encourage him to force a conflict with others. The groups of whispering boys and men indicated mischief, to which every one who had anything of power to stop it seemed strangely indifferent. Whenever he drew near one of these whispering groups, the whispering ceased and the men or boys moved off. Still, he caught enough of what was said to convince him that the Ashgrave farm was their objective point.

"Sech things hurts the good name o' the town, an' damages property," he confided to Peleg Singleton. "I hain't got no property, so I've got more call to look a'ter my good name."

Belief in the postmaster's official jealousy for the enforcement of law had taken Blanket to Singleton, only to encounter nice distinctions, the very existence of which he had not before suspected.

"Ef they was goin' to rob the U. S. mail or stop you carryin' it," he explained, "'t would be my duty as P. M. to do so'thin'. Ef they was goin' to murder you in yer private capacity, 't would be none o' my official business."

"I d 'no why they 'd want to murder me," said Blanket uneasily. "I hain't done 'em no harm."

"I war only usin' it es a illumination," Singleton explained loftily.

"Wall, don't illuminate thetaway any more," cautioned Blanket. "I don't like it. Enyway," he added, "you war hot enough at the meetin'."

"I war actin' thenes a church member an' a Christian."

Blanket hunched himself up in his favourite attitude when his horse was resting, and drawled out:

"At what pint in yer career, or at what partic'ler hour o' the day or night, du ye stop bein' a church member an' a Christian."

"I war speakin' officiously, not humanly," said the postmaster with dignity. "As a umble an' lowly fol-lerer, I continue to be a Christian et all times, but officiously I 'm one only when we be assembled an' met together."

"Wall, had n't you better du a little of the umble an' lowly jest at this pint, when the devil seems a breakin' out with a view to a cavortin' round in this community?"

Singleton gazed at the uncouth figure, while mild sorrow and the dignity of rebuke spread over his countenance.

"I 'm sorry to perceive, Brother Blanket, the light an' friv'lus natur of your Christian experunce. These things is not lightly tu be spoke of. In my secret closet, I ken lay the matter at the footstool, an' ax Him to deal with it in His wisdom."

"An' in the meantime, the devil's business won't be shet up in no closet, but will be done in the market-place, es it war. Hain't thar no way we c'n stop him fust? Hain't we got no duties as citizens an' tax-payers?" Blanket added the last word in recognition of the postmaster's position as a property owner. It struck him as somewhat flattering to the other's dignity.

"As citizens, it 's our duty to act," explained Singleton loftily, "when the sheruff o' the county calls together the cummus poseytutus, an' not afore."

"The what?" gasped Blanket.

"The cummus posutatus," said Singleton. "Thet 's when the citizens is called upon to keep order and put down riots an' breakage o' the peace."

"Wall, that 's jest what 's wanted now," said Blanket, with a sigh of relief. "I knowed you 'd tell us so'-thin' that w'd du the thing. How do you start this come an' tate us?"

"Pomus comsetaters," corrected the other. "The sheruff hes to start it. He calls 'em out."

"An' he 's to Belmont. What d' you du then?"

"Ye hev to wait."

"But 'spose the breakin' o' the peace don't wait?"

Singleton, at the end of his information, had only one refuge and that was to get angry and rail at Blanket as "An ignoramus an' a nuisance." Blanket accepted the upbraiding with due humility, and when it was over returned doggedly to the attack.

"It 's 'cause I don't know nothin' that I hev to ax questions o' them that do," he exclaimed. "Ef you can't git a sh'ruff, won't a town constable du?"

"What, Bill Jordan?" exclaimed Singleton, startled out of his superiority by the demand. "Bill Jordan start a poset cometaters! No! Besides he 's to hum, sleepin' off his last drunk."

Blanket, oppressed with the need of something being done and the clear fact of no one to do it, meandered down the road again, and heard in the distance the hum of voices, where the crowd was moving toward the cross-road. The silence in the village seemed ominous of evil, and he wondered dimly that, with so many men who

knew so much more than he, it should be left to him alone to try to stay the threatened wrong.

"Thar 's a so'thin' 'bout that Papist feller," he soliloquised; "thet's so kinder takin', I hate to see him in trouble. I vum, ev'ry time I see him, he makes me think of a caff I hed when I war a boy, thet looked a'ter me so pleadin' when they tuck him to the butcher's."

He brushed a tear away with the cuff of his coat, and walked on plunged in a double deep of gloom. That calf and memory had by some power roused the latent ability for affection in the man, till memory, stretching across the years, and fear, born of the darkness and the silence that had fallen on the village, united to stir him as he had never been stirred before.

In his perplexity, his thoughts naturally turned to the source of this immediate trouble, the sermon of the Sabbath before. It was a minister's business to preach against the devil and his cunning, but even so there was no use overdoing a thing, and if his judgment had been asked, he would have been compelled to admit, without charging that Mr. Craig had overdone it, that it might have been possible to be a trifle more moderate and still do one's duty.

"He might a' taken a hint from these new-fangled doctors an' gin us smaller doses. Thar 's some things thet 's all right thet 's rank pisen when took all to once."

So he turned and trudged doggedly to the Widow Marlow's and broke in upon the quiet hours of the Reverend Simeon Craig, who was fortifying himself for the next Sabbath day's effort in the pages of Fox's Book of Martyrs.

That a devil had been let loose in Padanaram, to place in danger the salvation of his people, he did not doubt. He saw before him his weakness and sin in letting the

love of woman break in upon the work to which his life was consecrated, and he questioned not that God had resolved to try him, whether he was of stuff or not to do His work, and he was arming himself for the conflict. It was not for him to say that the victory should be his; but it was for him to do, with all the might that was his, the work God had given him to do, and then to look to God for the issue. There was something of human impatience in the irritation he felt in Blanket's interruption. When the devil was ramping through Padanaram, in the shape of a full-fledged Catholic, the sight of an old, round-shouldered man, of stubborn nature and somewhat tedious discourse, was too commonplace for complete acquiescence.

"The devil 's loose, bigger 'n a woodchuck." Blanket's first words chimed in wonderfully with the line of his thoughts, and suggested that, after all, he might be an instrument sent to aid him in his task. It was part of his creed that God works in a mysterious way and by mysterious means in the doing of his wonders. He was too much of a countryman to take exception to Blanket's homely illustration.

"That old serpent has yet not been bound for the thousand years of rest, nor will he be until Babylon has fallen and the blood of the prophets and the saints is avenged."

"Wall jest now," Blanket began again deliberately, "that ole serpent is busy an' thar 's mischief brewin', an' I hain't clear in my mind, pahson, but we be sorter mixed up in what 's goin' on."

"What is it that 's going on, or that you think is?" demanded Craig sharply. It was as if Blanket, through the voicing of his fears, gave them substantial cause. Any miscarriage of his own plannings, he was prepared to resent on behalf of God.

"Thar 's a parcel o' men an' boys gone up to the cross-road, an' I kinder 'spicion they 're bound fur Ashgrave's farm."

"Well?" Neither word nor tone was of a nature to help Blanket out of the mire of inarticulateness in which he was confusing himself.

"They hain't the kinder gang I 'd want cavortin' round my house of a night time."

"Well?"

"Oh Lord, pahson," he broke out in sudden desperation, "I hain't got the gift o' gab, an' I 'd hev a hard time gettin' it out eny way, but your 'walls' air sorter like the ice, when it gets crosswise o' the stream an' dams the water. Thar 's mighty little doin' below."

"As a clergyman," Craig answered, with coldness that would have done credit to Blanket's dam of ice, "no one in my parish will ever find my door shut; but that 's no reason you should forget I 've my work to do. If you 've got anything to say to me, I will listen."

Blanket wiped his face and looked about the bare, dingy room, the picture of distress. Still, he rested under a genuine sense of obligation, and put himself again to the task.

"I mistrust, pahson, they 're a goin' to Ashgrave's erbout thet Papist feller. I heerd 'em keep sayin' over words thet sounded like 'Papist' an' 'Babylon' and sech like, an' so'thin' erbout drivin' somebody out, an'—an — an', the long an' short o' it is, pahson, I 'm afeard thar 'll be mischief a doin', 'specially ef Ashgrave 's to hum, which mos' likely he is."

"Well?"

But Craig had carried his show of indifference and non-comprehension beyond bounds, and this time, in-

stead of disconcerting Blanket, the blank "well" stung him to words.

"Ye don't need me to tell you pahson what's a-goin' on. These fellers heerd yer sarmont, an' they're mighty glad tu make it a excuse to du the devil's work. They've gone up thar to drive Ashgrave's man out o' town, and ef he don't go, or ef Ashgrave raises eny contraptions, thar's no tellin' what a gang like that may du. Thar'll be a fight, afore the thing's over, an' somebody's goin' to get hurt."

"Perhaps it'll be your Papist," sneered Craig, his resentment at the attitude his parishioner had taken waxing strong.

"You hain't got no call tu call him mine; but barrin' that, mabbe he will. I ax you, is that right? He hain't done nobody no harm ——"

"Has n't done anyone any harm!" interrupted the clergyman. "Has n't done anyone any harm! Do you mean to tell me that a man who worships idols, a man who goes to mass, a man who acknowledges the Pope of Rome as God's vicar on earth, does n't do any harm when he comes and settles in a Christian community and carries on his devilish performances right in the face of our children, and right under the shadow of our meeting-house? Do you, a member of the church, dare say this is doing no harm?"

But something of innate Yankee resistance to open domination, whether of priest or king, was stirred to life in Blanket's sluggish blood by this time, and he refused to be silenced by this outbreak.

"Mebbe he's doin' all this, pahson, but he's ben here nine or ten months, an' you did n't know yerself that he was a mass-monger till here this last week."

"I would be the last to deny my weaknesses," said

the clergyman, "but the fact that the watchman set upon the walls has been so blind or negligent as to let the enemy creep up without seeing him, does not prevent his being there. The very subtlety he has shown, under the aid of his friend, the devil, makes him more, not less, dangerous."

"Wall; I hain't got not objection to yer preachin' agin the Papists, an' Babylon an' mass-mongerin' an' all them kinder heathen things, 'cause that's yer business an' we pay ye fur it; but I du say that 'cause a feller b'lieves so'thin' that I don't, or don't b'lieve so'thin' that I du, hain't no reason why a gang o' loafers sh'd drive him out o' town, an' mebbe get into a row with him an' maul him round."

"Their zeal may take a wrong method, but as a clergyman, I can forgive much to those who are zealous for the faith delivered to us by the fathers, who are anxious for the sake of religion pure and undefiled. That is the spirit of their fathers, who stood against king and bishop for the right to worship God in their own way, in humbleness and fear."

"An' tu make ev'rybody else du it tu," said Blanket. The fear of the clergyman had vanished and the spirit of defiance was blazing up. Craig saw it and was wise enough to seek a retreat before he was compelled to notice his parishioner's defection, and rebuke him for it.

"Well, what do you want me to do?"

"It kinder seemed tu me, sense your sarmont hed started the mischief, it would n't be outer place fur ye to go over to the farm, an' ef wuss come to wuss, jest quiet the fellers down an' see that no harm's done."

"My sermon did not start what you are pleased to call 'the mischief.' That was done by Ashgrave in

bringing that Papist into town. I resent your implication that I'm responsible, and if I went there, I'd go to encourage the spirit that aims to rid this community of a son of the Harlot of Rome, an idolater ——”

There came a quick rapping at the door and the voice of Mrs. Marlow calling in frightened excitement:

“Oh, Mr. Craig, Mr. Craig, come quick! The hull world's on fire: Jest see how it's a blazin' up beyond the hills back o' Joe Ashgrave's! If 't ain't the Day o' Jedgment, then it's mighty close kin to it!”

CHAPTER XLI

BARNABY TO THE RESCUE

A MANDA expected, on reaching the barn, to find the Canadian at work loosing the stock. Instead, she found only the beasts, already becoming excited under terror of the increasing blaze. Accustomed all her life to horses and cattle, she went among them with the confidence of a man, and her very fearlessness soothed and quieted them. When she had set open the rear door, she began unfastening the halters and stall-chains. Behind her, from the direction of the house, came the shouts of the mob and the crackling of flames. She could not distinguish Ashgrave's voice, even if he was speaking.

As she approached the cow-shed, she heard the opening of the door, followed by some one's entrance. Assured that it was the Canadian, she called that they were to get the cattle into the second pasture, as Ashgrave had directed. A chain rattled, as if it had been dropped, and a voice called through the gloom.

"Amanda! You here?"

She recognised Barnaby, and under the shock for a moment leaned against the door-frame.

"Yes. I am trying to save the stock."

"Why didn't some of those fools out there come and do it?" He was at work loosing the cattle again.

She was bewildered by the question, and Barnaby, getting no answer, went on:

"They can't save the house, even if they'd work instead of just shouting."

"They are n't trying to save it," she said, perceiving his mistake. "They set it on fire."

"What!" he exclaimed, walking beside her and making almost as if he would touch her as they drove the cattle into the pasture. "I saw the fire and came to help. I supposed they were trying to save the house, and as I came by the barn and heard the cattle, thought they had been forgotten."

She was too intent on the task to do much talking, but when they had got the herd into the second pasture and had replaced the bars, she suddenly said:

"You were to go away."

"I did n't promise."

The flames shot higher, and now and then a great spark of living coal fell on the roof of the barn or at their feet. She made no answer, and he came back to his first surprise.

"How came you here?" he asked.

"My husband wanted me to come to him and I came." She said it defiantly, under the feeling that he was placing more on her than he had a right, in thus remaining when she had commanded him to leave, and in tempting her to divided allegiance when by her act she was closing the door of retreat.

"You are going to live with that brute?" he demanded sharply.

"That brute," she repeated, a spirit of revolt against injustice becoming sharply dominant, "is fighting for his life against that mob. I may not get a chance to live or die with him."

She had not failed to understand something of Ashgrave's purpose in sending her from the house, and she

knew, as well as if she had seen it, that the door to the cellar was locked against her possible return. There had been something too in his speaking that word "we," when he said "we'll have nothing but the land and stock," that stirred within her a new sense of the helplessness of this strong man, who before had carried everything by the force of his personality. It smote her woman's heart and made it tender for him, as it had not been since the day of the great transgression. It was this that stung her to ask for one kiss, and that had kindled that within her which warmed as she waited desolate the issue of the conflict waged within that fast widening circle of light.

"What has he done — now?" Barnaby asked, the "now" slipping out against his will and making him curse himself for a blunderer.

"He hired a Catholic to work for him."

"But that can't explain all this," he said.

"It does, though. They tried to drive the boy away and attacked the house. Joe tried to keep 'em out and they set fire to it."

"My God!" exclaimed Barnaby; "and all because of a Catholic! But why does n't he come? It's a furnace in there by this time."

She suddenly bethought herself of blame.

"He's waiting to give time to save the stock. I must go and tell him."

"You 'll stay here," declared Barnaby. "It's a man's job, if he needs help."

She saw his face in a sharp flare of the flames, and knew that she could trust him. Then too she remembered her father's words, when she and Ashgrave left the farm, and formed a quick purpose to hasten home and appeal to him for the help that was so sorely needed.

"Tell him," she said, "that he must n't take any further risk. He can't save the house or barn ——"

"And you would have him save himself?" interrupted Barnaby.

"He must save himself," she answered.

Just when Barnaby reached the door into the kitchen, there came a lull in the babel of shouting, and above the crackle of the flames, he heard Ashgrave's voice in what seemed a final appeal to the mob to save the house. Barnaby lifted the latch, but the door was fastened, and he paused a moment lest his entrance at this instant should mar the effect of Ashgrave's appeal. The mob seemed to be listening, with something of the instinct that gives the condemned the privilege of speech on the gallows.

"Come, boys," Ashgrave was saying, "this is getting a little too serious. You 'll burn the house if you let it go further."

"The Canuck! Turn out the Canuck, an' we 'll stop the fire!" The cry of the few was reechoed through the throng. "The Canuck! turn out the Canuck!"

A sudden expedient seemed to occur to Ashgrave.

"The boy is n't here, he 's gone," he said.

"You 're a liar!" the crowd yelled. "He is here, an' you know it!"

"I tell you he is 'nt," Ashgrave reiterated, anger at the failure of his device and at the insult making his voice hard.

"Where is he, then?" Ashgrave was silent and the crowd took up the yell. "Where is he? Where c'n we get him?"

One of the mob apparently stepped forward, for his voice came more distinctly.

"Joe," he said, "we 've got nothin' agin you, but we 're

goin' to hev that thar bloody Papist. If he hain't in the house, we don't want to burn it, but ef he is, we 'll smoke him out, ef we hev to burn you with it. Whar is he?"

"Yep, whar is he?" the crowd yelled.

"This is my house," Ashgrave shouted, "and I know every one of you. If there's a law in the land, you 'll smart for this."

"Dead men tell no tales!" some one called, and the crowd laughed.

"Come, Joe," the man's voice came clear again, "tell us whar he is, an' stop this thing, while thar 's time."

"I 'll see the house burn and you in hell before I 'll do it!" he shouted.

A yell of resentment and disappointment went up from the crowd, and a volley of stones rattled against the house. Above this tumult, Barnaby heard a sound as if a heavy body had fallen, and then came a low groan. The crowd gave a yell that sounded like a cry of triumph, and the fire seemed to redouble its force.

Barnaby understood, from the shoutings of the mob, that the heavy fall which shook the floor must be Ashgrave. He stepped back to give force to his blow, and threw himself against the door. At the second thrust it gave way, and he was precipitated headlong into the kitchen. He gathered himself up, dazzled with the sudden burst of light after the darkness of the cellar. The roar of the fire had grown markedly greater, and across the windows darted serpents of flame that thrust, as it were, tongues into the room, seeking to seize and devour its contents. Already the house was beyond saving.

Before the window lay Ashgrave, and one tongue of flame almost caught him, as it darted through the broken sash. Then it drew back as if for a second spring.

Barnaby stooped and found Ashgrave breathing, but unconscious. He raised himself to determine how best to save him, and some one, catching sight of his face, and mistaking him for the Canadian, raised the cry:

"Thar he is! thar's the Papist! Now we've got him! Now fur the Canuck!"

There was a rush through the smoke and flame, which on a lesser cause would have daunted the men, and it seemed to Barnaby as if his effort was lost. Groping blindly for something with which to defend himself, his hand fell on the musket. With the instinct of self-preservation, he thrust it through the window and fired. It was loaded with bird shot that scattered and stung, producing panic far in excess of the execution it did. The foremost of the mob fell back, cursing and frightened, and encountering the crush of those behind, came in confusion on the ground, where the others fell and sprawled over them, doubling the confusion and fright.

Barnaby dropped the musket and seized Ashgrave. He lifted the great body as if it were that of a child. By some rare presence of mind, he closed the cellar door behind him, and so staggering and dragging the inert mass, traversed the passage and gained the barn. The fire had already caught its roof, and sparks were ready to drop at any moment into the mows. Behind him was the yell of the mob that was already scrambling through the windows into the burning farmhouse. All this was as a spur to his fagged muscles. He carried Ashgrave through the rear door, which he closed carefully to cover for the time his retreat. Then he lifted and carried him along the shadows and across the pastures, and finally laid him, still unconscious, behind the shelter-shed in the second pasture. Amanda was nowhere in sight. Behind him, the barn was already sending its

column of flame heavenward. As a point of concealment, the shelter-shed could be relied on for but a few moments at best.

He crept out into the pasture, where the cattle and horses were growing restless and wild under the excitement of the fire, and caught the halter of one of the horses. Behind the shed he succeeded, with almost superhuman effort, in lifting Ashgrave astride the horse, to which he fastened him with a rope he had found in the shed. He had determined on an effort to reach the sashouse in the sugar grove, as the least dangerous shelter he could think of. He led the horse to the bars, where the old wood road that led to the camp opened from the pasture, and stooping to let them down, was startled to see another hand reaching out from the other side for the same purpose. Before he could recover, Amanda spoke:

"Is he alive or dead?"

"Alive so far; but a stone hit him behind the ear and he is badly hurt."

"I have seen my father," she said. "He will not let us come there. Where can we go?"

"I was going to take him to the sugar camp," said Barnaby.

She put up the bars, slowly and mechanically, recognising their utility in blinding pursuit. Then she followed behind the horse, slow-moving, with her eyes fixed on the great shapeless mass fastened to his back, which sometimes, lighted by the flames of their burning home, took on a grotesque resemblance to a man. Did it mean that God had put the seal of his condemnation on their union, as her father said there in the sunken path where she met him, coming at the call of the fire, and begged him to save their all from the mob? He had

come with neighbourly promptness when he saw the banner of flame, but when she told him, he turned back without lifting a finger against the cruelty and wrong of the mob! And when she pleaded, he told her it was God's hand, punishing her husband and condemning their marriage. What if it were true?

No, that was not the sting. She would be honest with herself. God could but condemn Ashgrave's shelter of a Catholic, his wrong to religion in bringing a Papist into the town. It was no use shutting one's eyes to that. But it was not God, it was her own father, who had said to her that she should always have a home and protection under his roof, let who would condemn; but that he would not give shelter to Ashgrave, not if he saw him dying by the roadside; not if a crust of bread or a dipper of water would save him. And who knew but he was dying; dying there with no shelter at hand but the old sugar camp, with no one to help but she and — Barnaby? There was the sting of the night's work! Thus she trudged on behind the trembling horse as he climbed, with his wobbling, swaying load, up the rough wood road to the shelter of the sugar camp.

CHAPTER XLII

THE WATCH

THEIR refuge, dreary under any circumstances, was all but unbearable in the actual situation. They found a few bits of candle left from the last sugar season, and with some mouldy straw did their best to make a bed for the unconscious man. Amanda helped Barnaby get him from the horse and into the camp. The contusion behind the ear showed black with the infusion of blood. Barnaby worked as in a dream, the sense of Amanda's nearness making doubly strange any task involving Ashgrave.

"We must get a doctor," Amanda announced, standing in helpless fright before the unconsciousness and the heavy breathing.

"Some leeches, if we had them, might help, until he can reach here," Barnaby suggested.

"Bloodsuckers?" Amanda asked, using the country name.

She had set herself to work, with a woman's instinct, to make more tolerable the hole in which they were hidden. Whatever she might feel in the future for this man, now there was only tenderness and apprehension in her heart. The impulsion to do, to help, the informing spirit of the helpmate, was controlling and left no place for resentment or recrimination. At last she said aloud what she had been thinking while she was working:

"They're in a jar, on the second shelf of the kitchen cupboard."

Barnaby, who was loath to leave, though he knew she had really meant him to go for the physician, looked at her enquiringly, and when she got the meaning of the look, she realized how blind her statement was. Then she added:

"The bloodsuckers."

"I can go and get them," he said, looking down at the unconscious man. "They might save his life."

"There is no one there," she explained, adding, "I could get in through the shed." Then she turned to him "Can you take care of him?"

"Unless they come. Then it would not help, if you were here."

When she prepared to go, he raised objections to which she refused heed, giving him directions for bathing Ashgrave's head. She had already loosened his neck-band. When Barnaby felt himself compelled to yield, he made this suggestion:

"We have nothing to eat. If you could get some —"

"No," she said, with positiveness. "The blood-suckers — they are for the sick. To take bread would be stealing."

"From your father's house?" he urged.

"I can't help it," she said. "Father said he would n't give him a night's shelter nor a crust of bread if he was dying. We 'll have to take our chances on food."

She plunged into the dark and left him with the injured man. When she came out of the grove on the crest of the hill, the flames were shooting straight up from the interior of the house and barn, fed by the roof timbers, which had fallen in. Like swarming ants, men and boys were darting here and there in the intense light, and she saw a pile of what seemed articles taken from the house lying on one side. Just on the edge of

the darkness were groups of spectators, who had evidently been drawn together by the unusual sight, among whom she distinguished a number of women. It was possible her mother was of them, and in any event they afforded her cover in taking the shortest way home, for if she were recognised, it would naturally be assumed that she too had come to see the fire.

She found the house deserted and easily accomplished her purpose. It seemed as if she had been from home a long time. An irresistible impulse seized her to go through the house and take another look at all that had been familiar through long years and had already, in so brief hours, under the stress of new experience, taken on an air of strangeness. She went to her own room, and in a dim way recalled the shame she had felt when Ashgrave came there with her; but she had to stop and reason with herself before she could accept it that it was that very evening on which she had that experience, which had grown dim and far away.

In the pantry she came upon some loaves of freshly baked bread, standing on end and cooling under white cloths thrown lightly over them. She thought of Barnaby's suggestion, but her resolution did not falter, and she turned away unremorseful for the hunger of the morrow. She took some vinegar, for when a blood-sucker will not take hold, one can force him by washing the place with vinegar.

On her way back, a group passed her in the sunken path, where she drew herself into the bushes. The fire had begun to die down and they were going homeward, with curiosity sated. A man was speaking:

"It 's a gold watch, they found it in a locked dra'r in the highboy. One o' the Graves boys broke it open with a stun. They du say it b'longs to thet air Barnaby

that went off sudden like a year ago come July, an' was a'terward found over Milbank way."

"Sho! How'd it come thar?" One of the women spoke.

The other, more quick to catch the significance of the affair, exclaimed:

"Joe Ashgrave must a' stole it from him."

"Some on 'em think mebbe 't was wuss 'n thet."

A sudden faintness came over Amanda and she was near falling. Barnaby's watch in Ashgrave's bedroom! Stolen it must have been. That was plain; but even beyond that was the question, When? How? Ashgrave had said that Barnaby went in the direction of the cross-road. The man had declared that some people thought it was worse than stealing. Was it then Ashgrave who was responsible for Barnaby's supposed accident? If so, he must have attacked and robbed him, leaving him helpless to wander away and perish, if it so happened. And all these months, he had lied about the matter, thus concealing his great crime with the meanness of falsehood! She went on, staggering and stumbling like a blind person or one walking in the dark along an unknown road.

Yet she set herself, on reaching the camp, to the task of caring for the wounded man, finding in this doing the only relief from the torment of bitter thought that ran riot within. She forgot her assertion to Barnaby that God had taken him from her until she had confessed, and it had ceased to be possible that they should marry. She saw now only the human side, exemplified in Ashgrave's agency. The accidental touch of Barnaby's hand, as he joined in some task for the comfort of the injured man; the noise of his moving about the shed; the mere knowledge that he was delaying starting for

the physician, because he would not leave her alone in the night with that mob of men and boys at hand, kept alive the thought that he had been tender and protecting, where her husband had stripped her of purity and robbed her of her last defender.

Out of this confusion, one thought came constantly to the fore, only to come again and again with insistent force when she strove to thrust it back, and that was, had she at last filled the measure of repentance that God demanded, and was this the means and hour of her deliverance? In placing it on God, she seemed to divorce herself from responsibility for any ungenerosity of thought involved in such a question. She had yielded when He demanded of her the greatest sacrifice a woman could give. Was she to shrink on behalf of another where she had not hesitated for herself?

If God was now to spare her further, it was not her help He needed, nor was she to offer it. What He had determined would be, and her part in it was merely to wait on Him and receive what He gave. Therefore, repugnant as was the thought of relief, she worked with her utmost might to do all in behalf of Ashgrave that she knew. In this mood too she urged Barnaby to go for a physician, and was insistent with him when he averred that for no consideration could he leave her at this lonely spot, with the injured man to care for, and men and boys at hand who had just been guilty of so wanton an act of destruction, which had inflamed passions and, perhaps, left them reckless of what further acts they might commit.

As the night wore on, he tried to induce her to take some sleep, or at least rest on a bed of straw he spread in the corner farthest from that in which Ashgrave lay; but the events of the day and evening had wrought too keenly on her nervous force to permit sleep. To this

was added also the conviction that this was the hour of crisis in her life, and in it was the determination whether she was to remain under the yoke of her enforced marriage to a man doubly guilty, as she now saw Ashgrave, or was to be released from the burden of her punishment, because it had been meted to her full measure in the judgment of God. For to this her thought constantly reverted, that only if she had suffered to the full, would pardon be vouchsafed. She could not reveal to Barnaby the supreme meaning to her of this night of watching; neither could she, while the issue was undecided, surrender herself to sleep.

Toward morning, Ashgrave's breathing grew heavier and more laboured, and there was a twitching of the muscles, at times, that was uncanny and alarming. Already in the east a white softness was stealing up the sky, birds were chirping and calling more often than during the night, and out of the blackness the indistinguishable bulk was taking the forms that day makes familiar. Down in the valley were the piles of smoking ruins, from which darted at times a tongue of flame, like a serpent that reared itself in search of prey. Not one was on watch now. The lust of destruction had spent itself to gratification, and the corpse of a house was left unguarded. She aroused Barnaby, who was nodding from sheer weariness, which she seemed not to feel.

"You must go to Belmont for a doctor," she said, pointing toward Ashgrave.

He leaned over the other, listened to his breathing, and felt the strange beating of his heart. He too was waiting, but not in submission to the decision God should give, so much as in revolt that between him and the woman he loved, so hideous an alternative should rear itself.

"I will find some one to go," he said. "It is safe to leave you for a time, but not long enough to go clear to Belmont."

"You need not fear for me," she said. "Don't let us poison the future with any memory of failure to-night."

Her words were like an echo to his dream, and he turned quickly to her; but her face was unimpassioned and without hope. He went out to his errand, without answering.

When he was gone, the time dragged heavily, and hunger came to enhance the weariness of the sleepless night. The nervous tension grew as the dawn grew, with no sound to break the stillness, save the heavy breathing of the injured man. The freshness of the spring air became a depressing chill.

Once, when to lessen the strain Amanda went to the hilltop, to see if perchance she might catch a glimpse of Barnaby, she fancied she saw men lurking in the under-brush on the outskirts of the Ashgrave farm, but even while she looked, they seemed to vanish, and she went back in doubt whether she had seen them or not.

At times she felt that she hated the man who lay there before her, a dumb thing that had only breath to prove him still a man. At times, it seemed that the love she once felt had never been weakened, and that it was some hideous misunderstanding that had held them apart. If there was the actual bond of love between them, they were one by virtue of that which made the title of body in body and soul in soul. Where had been the sin then which, imagined for a time, had built the barrier of separation? She strove to revivify that sense of sin and impurity which had once been so real. She found herself able only to conjure up a nebulous dimness of pain

that refused to take actual form, and which faded the instant the effort of the will was relaxed.

Yet she knew there was something, awfully real, lurking close at hand, insistent to be heard and measured, which see and hear and measure she must, whether she would or not. It was this which she was fighting off in her effort to reanimate a forgotten pain and to prod herself into the memory of a sin which had ceased to trouble her. The very fact that she dared not recall the words she heard the night before regarding the watch found in the burning house, told where this reality lurked behind the shame she strove to keep alive.

As she looked at the insensible, scarcely breathing mass, it was not for the loss of good name, the shame of dishonour and the disavowal of friends that she could not forgive him, but that he had taken the joy of real love out of her life. These were nothing; this everything. These were an accident; this was of God. It was useless to measure her thoughts by judgment, for back of judgment was that which overtopped judgment — and that was truth. She had her right of love, and of it this man had robbed her. That fact filled all space; there was no room for anything that was less or nothing.

As the fresh spring morning grew into beauty, she went again and again to the ridge, and looked down on the ravaged farm, which lay with a strange stillness, black and desolate, a blot on the glad sunshine. Not even the boys, who find their way everywhere, with dogged burrowings into every strange thing, came yet. Then it occurred to her that the farm was a trap, baited for the man she had there, hidden in the sugar camp. Her quick intellect leaped the chasm of thought, and she saw that he was wanted for the robbery of Barnaby.

How strangely God had wrought out his vengeance.

"Vengeance is mine," He had said, "I will repay." Ashgrave had covered every trace of his deed, had stifled suspicion, if it had ever taken form, and yet, out of the very event that promised the destruction of evidence, God had shaped the instrument of his detection! Surely He had spoken, and it was beyond doubt that He meant that Ashgrave should be punished. Yet she was standing between Him and his purpose!

God had given him into her hands; she might not win back love and that of which he had robbed her, but she could at least pay back to him the dole he had wrought for her and in so doing serve the purpose of God.

She hurried through the woods, eager to her errand of vengeance, afraid that something would rob her of the recompense that had been laid in her hand, ere she could shut her grasp firmly upon it. Yet constantly, with iteration that would have been tiresome but for the fever in her blood, she answered and reanswered the doubt that beat at the door of her conscience — "If this is not what God means me to do, let him stop me. He can make me slip on this moss and sprain my ankle, He can make me fall on a rolling stone and break my leg. If He does not, I know He means me to do this."

Then she took up the task of measuring distances and fixing bounds — "If He lets me reach that tree, I will know I am doing right. If I get as far as that cross-path, He means me to go on." As often as she passed the tree or reached the path, the protest of her womanliness set itself another mark in test, and again she challenged God to interfere and save her from herself.

Where the trees broke away into the pasture land, she saw Padanaram lying below her in the green loveliness of early spring time, its quiet farmsteads nestling among its great trees, as if washed and purified in the golden

glory of sunshine and renewing life. She stopped in amaze at comprehension that, from this Edenlike quiet and beauty, had been born the evil and passion that had swept over the Ashgrave farm and left it a desolation. It was as if a laughing, golden-haired child had suddenly been transformed into a monster of wickedness, committed some hideous crime, and then become again the picture of innocence and beauty. It seemed as if, somewhere, she must see the blackness of the awful thing Padanaram had been the night before.

As she looked, the errand which had turned her steps lay forgotten in the chambers of thought, and she saw only this wonder of beauty, mother of the hideous. Then, out of the silence, her purpose looked her in the face and challenged accomplishment. There lay the road to revenge; a few steps more, and all that she had asked was hers. She had but to speak the word and it was done, and she could be again — happy? innocent? beloved? Would the quiet current of her days cover this which she was about to do, so that peace and beauty would abide with her again, as it abode after last night's blackness with Padanaram?

She looked once more at the fair village, flooded with the shower of golden sunshine, and, turning, took her way slowly up the hillside and through the woods to the desolate sugar camp. Her mind lay blank of all purpose and all sensation, save only renunciation. If vengeance was God's purpose, His was the means of accomplishment. She pushed open the door, and her glance turned to the pile of straw in the corner. On it lay Ashgrave — dead.

CHAPTER XLIII

THE REJECTION OF ASHGRAVE

IN THE presence of the dead, whom she dimly felt in a way to have died for her, Amanda knew again the stirrings of that troublesome New England conscience, which is rather an entailed inheritance than a mere personal possession. The application of the tests of the community in which one lives becomes instinctive, so that even the conscienceless man must act on a higher standard among one people than another. Thus the girl by the chain of inheritance found herself subject to the most rigid of Puritanic rules of judgment, and by these she stood convicted at the bar of personal consciousness. She had wished Ashgrave dead. Before that fact, the actual circumstances of death were meaningless. Sin was of the heart, not of the mere deed itself, and in the silence of that hovel of death, she heard Christ's words, "but I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment."

To this mood Barnaby, when at last he found some one who would go to Belmont for the physician, returned. The shock of finding Ashgrave dead, was less than that of the first hint of Amanda's self-condemnation. The revelation of this was a flash that uncovered, and he was aghast for the moment at the realisation that under the sense of shock was a note of hope that, conventionally, he had no right to tolerate. Yet her present attitude might easily crystallise into a phase of developed

conscience, before convention permitted him to present his claims and urge his arguments.

From this elementally selfish attitude, he was roused by the need for action in Amanda's behalf. Among the acts to be done was the summoning of the coroner, preparatory to the removal of Ashgrave's body.

"Where to?" Amanda asked. "Those ruins down there?"

Whatever she had been, whatever she was to be, it struck him that, for the time at least, she was the embittered wife robbed of her mate and stung with a sense of her own share in the crime of his despoilment.

"To your home, of course," he answered.

"That was to be my home," she said bitterly, pointing into the valley, with intentness that he should not separate her from Ashgrave, excepting in the thought of which she had no power of control.

He felt the unfriendliness, not to say harshness, of her answer. It was his first glimpse of the cruelty of which a woman in her grief is capable.

"I meant your father's house," he said, making allowance rather for the nervous tension of the night, than for the fact of actual grief, and striving to soothe her as he would a wilful child.

"My father! Do you think he would let a dead man be brought into his house, let alone its being Joe?"

"Why not?" demanded Barnaby, his surprise dominating his voice and expression.

"Don't you know that to bring a dead body into any house is to bring bad luck as well?" answered Amanda.

"Why, if you come to that," declared Barnaby, "you could n't take him anywhere. Every house could be closed on the same plea."

"Every house will be closed," replied Amanda, her manner showing that she had already traversed the ground in her own mind. "He'll have to be buried from here, since his house is burned."

"And you call this a Christian community."

"Oh," she said, her community sense overcoming the personal, "it could do him no good; he is dead. There is no use injuring them for his sake now."

"But in all decency, he must be buried from some place," he exclaimed. "Why, the good name of the village is at stake."

She laughed, a trifle unpleasantly, and found comfort in the scourge of bitterness she saw herself unable to escape.

"The place that was good enough for him to die in is good enough for him to be buried from."

The wild devotion he had shown her in his turbulent love, the remembrance of his asserted need for her when he came the night before, and that last touch of gentleness amid the destruction of the farm were uniting to soften the memory of the past, under the natural grief and shock of her position, and to put her in arms against a community that had finally killed him. For the moment Barnaby was rather of, than apart from, that community, and the antagonism, which she dimly felt had made of the relations of the two men something that she did not understand, added to this phase. The righteous wrath which she had felt over the discovery of the watch and the train of circumstances to which it pointed, ceased, save as an underlying force that made for repentance for injustice done the dead.

When Barnaby was seeking a messenger to send for the physician, regard to her fears prevented his

going to her father; but every consideration made for the opposite course when he left the sugar camp the second time.

"So the 'tarnal critter's got his comeupance at last, hes he?" Seagrave demanded, when he had expressed surprise at Barnaby's appearance and had listened to his story.

"He's dead, at least," said Barnaby, throwing into his tone as much as he could of his protest against the spirit of intolerance which made Seagrave representative of the community, "and somebody ought to hang for it."

"What killed him?" Tom, who had listened with a pale face, asked the question with lips that were tremulous.

"A stone struck him back of the ear and knocked him over like an ox struck on the head with an axe. He never opened his eyes again."

"Ye need n't tumble over, ef he be dead," Seagrave grunted brusquely, watching the increasing pallor of the boy's face. "Thar hain't nobody goin' to raise eny fuss over losin' him. Ef you know anythin', hold your tongue."

"I don't," Tom faltered. "I wish I had n't ben thar," and he broke into sobs.

Barnaby stood appalled over the tragedy he saw himself to have uncovered, fearing dimly lest it should be revealed to Amanda as well. With an effort, however, he recovered himself, and broached the matter of the coroner and the taking of the body to the Seagraves for the funeral.

"Mandy ken come eny time she wants to," the farmer answered, "but I hain't agoin' to hev no dead man brought here, an' 'specially Joe Ashgrave. Mother

would n't hev it nohow, even ef I would, which I would n't."

"But his own house is burned," Barnaby began, only to be interrupted sharply with:

"I don't care ef 't is! I did n't burn it! I hain't goin' tu take no chances hevin' him or any dead man brought into my house."

"No, dad! don't let 'em do it! Don't let 'em bring him here!" cried Tom.

"You go into the house an' hold yer tongue," the farmer retorted. "Ef you want to be a 'tarnal fool, go an' be it all by yerself."

"He's got to be buried from somewhere," Barnaby urged.

"Wall, let him be," Seagrave answered. "I hain't got nothin' to say agin it."

"But if you refuse him, who's going to give him room."

"I do'no an' I don't care. All I know is, I hain't goin' to hev him here."

When Barnaby had made his report to the coroner, in his perplexity he sought out the clergyman and told him his trouble, hoping that he would exert his authority, and wholly losing the fact that Craig's interest in Ashgrave had ceased with his death. The issue of salvation and eternal damnation was of the past. Death had fixed his status for the unending ages, and the clergyman's task was done.

"What brought you back?" Craig demanded.

"I came because I wanted to and had a right to," Barnaby answered.

"You had no right to, under the circumstances, and you know it."

"We can let that go," replied Barnaby impatiently. "There's enough for me to do just now, and there does n't seem to be anyone else to do it."

"That's no excuse for your being here. That girl was married, and you knew it."

"She's a widow now, anyway, and the town that's made her one leaves her alone with her dead, as if she were an outcast or a leper."

"You seem much concerned — for her dead!"

"I'm concerned for her. I'm concerned too that there is a place on God's footstool that can stand unmoved by a tragedy of this kind."

"If there's a lesson in his fate for others, I shall deal with it in its proper time. As for him, he died as the fool dieth. I have nothing more to do with him, or for him."

"Why, there's the funeral service," Barnaby reminded him.

"He had become as a heathen man and a publican, and had no future part with the people of God. Therefore, the church has no further part with him, nor have I, as its representative."

Barnaby drew closer to the speaker and sought to read in his face some sign that he spoke with less than his usual singleness. He found nothing in his cold fanaticism to encourage, but still he could not forbear further protest.

"But a prayer at his grave, surely."

"Why? To pray for the dead, which is an abomination in the sight of the Lord? To give thanks for his life, which has been a reproach and a scandal? To ask God to make it a warning to those who, like him, walk the way of death? I can do that at a more fitting time."

"But it is n't seemly, it is n't decent for a human being to go under ground as you would bury a dead dog!"

"Was his living seemly? Was it decent? Did he live as a human being or as a dog?" answered Craig passionately.

"But that is over, it is ended," Barnaby expostulated.

"Yes, it is ended, and in the name of the seemly, you want a lying priest to stand at the grave and tell the world lies! What was abominable when he was living is not made seemly and decent by his death! Sin is sin, whether you believe it or not, and the sin of the dead man is not made righteousness by his death. If I speak at his grave, it will be with the words of truth, not lies, in my mouth. I am the apostle of Jesus Christ, not of the seemly and the decent that is content, if but the platter be clean without, to deny the ravening and wickedness of the inward abomination!"

CHAPTER XLIV

THE BURIAL

A SHGRAVE was buried from the sugar camp, which Amanda refused to leave until after the burial. With the ingenuity of a woman for self torture, she convinced herself, for the time at least, that her refusals to marry him were the real cause of his later vagaries, and she set herself to the task of repentance, with the zeal of a convert momentarily sustained by feminine capacity for the illogical. She succeeded in making the few, who were ready to help her, thoroughly uncomfortable.

Her father and mother, insistent on her return home, refused to come near the camp, and in return she forbade Barnaby to accept for her anything in the way of food, or of means to lessen the dreariness of the camp, which they would not have denied. It was only by making an ally of Blanket that he prevented her carrying her martyrdom to the limit of hunger and the lack of a bed or even a chair to sit on. The sense of isolation from her kind was the craving of her instinct of remorse, and of this outward discomfort in the companionship of her dead was tangible sign and evidence.

Barnaby found nothing in himself or his experience to illumine, much less explain, this phase of Amanda's shock and grief, and from the fact of the non-understandable argued the inexplicable.

"Women hain't like men," Blanket elucidated, when Barnaby in his perplexity appealed to him; "scurcely more 'n men air like women. It's a long guess tu call 'em both humans."

Barnaby did not even understand, when the matter of the night was up, that it was a sense of pity for him, striving with her resentful alienation from her own, that forced from her a suggestion that her brothers should come and sleep before a fire of logs in front of the shanty. He went, however, on the errand and to the panicky refusal, especially on Tom's part, which he foresaw, and then made arrangements for himself and Blanket, under the pretence that the boys would not come until later in the evening. He hoped that she would fall asleep and so escape knowledge, at least until morning, that he was the real watcher.

She was showing him a phase of character, the existence of which he had not before suspected, and which he studied with the curious inexperience of youth that has seen the other sex only when on its guard against itself and the instincts which civilisation has taught it to fear.

"I don't believe she ever loved Ashgrave," he said to Blanket, as they lay before the log fire wrapped in buffalo skins and feeling the comfort of warmth under the clear heavens, "but anybody who didn't know would never guess it."

"Women be cu'rus critters," Blanket expounded. "They be so tender hearted, it makes 'em twice as sorry not to be sorry as ef they war."

So she was grieving because she could not grieve. It was a new conception to Barnaby and he blessed Blanket for it. He wanted no further word on this, for it gave him all, and lest Blanket should be tempted

to enlarge, he hastened to change the subject, and found Craig the most apt as a new one.

"He's as heartless as a block of ice," he declared, after giving his companion an outline of his morning's visit to the clergyman.

"He's sorter ser'ous minded, fur a fac'," Blanket admitted.

"What do you suppose God makes such men for, anyway?"

"Fur pahsons, I guess. Leastwise they seem tu sorter drift that-a-way," Blanket answered.

Wearied as he was, for he had not slept since waking at the Junction on the morning of the previous day, the problem that Amanda offered was too perplexing for him to sleep. It was scarcely twenty-four hours since she had owned again her love for him, yet this dead man, who had stood between them, overshadowed everything and stood more effectually between them than he had while living. From Blanket's wrappings came a drowsy question:

"Seein' what ye've seen to-day, would ye advise me to marry the Widder Marlow?"

"Do you want to marry her?" asked Barnaby, irritated that this old question should perpetually ask itself.

"Wall, I vum, that's jest what I hain't never ben sartain erbout, try's hard's I could tu make up my mind," Blanket admitted.

"Then you don't," asserted Barnaby, reading clearness in this state of mind at least.

"Wall, y' see," argued Blanket, tenacious of his point of view, "it's jest this-a-way. She's got nobody to look a'ter her, an' she's got a nice bit o' money, an' it might turn out a comf'table sorter shelter a'ter I got too old fur the stage drivin'."

"Then you do," Barnaby assured him, finding a new viewpoint from which to pass upon the question.

"Ye see," explained Blanket, "t ain't to be expected a man won't larn so'thin' with years an' exper'unce. I've seen a 'tarnal lot o' folks in my time merry fur love. I hain't sayin' t ain't all right when ye're young 'nough an' light-hearted 'nough to carry a load; but thar comes a time when you care more fur the solid things than the trimmin's — fur comfort, an' a good cook an' so'thin' sure when the cookin's goin' to be done. I've got thar."

"Blanket," said Barnaby sharply, "there's just one thing that'll cure you of wanting to marry Mrs. Marlow."

"What's that?" demanded Blanket.

"To do it."

"By gum!" he exclaimed, sitting up and looking like a buffalo and an Esquimaux rolled in one, "you've hit the nail squar' on the head, driv it in an' clinched it on t'other side. It takes eddication tu du a thing like that!"

Then he rolled over without telling his companion whether or not he purposed trying the remedy, and was soon snoring to the stars, while Barnaby dozed and woke, puzzling over his problem, and so worked through the night to the morning of the burial.

This took place at a spot on the farm which Amanda selected, for she would not hear of a burial among the dead of those who had rejected Ashgrave and made him an outcast. She and Barnaby followed the coffin, borne by men whom the undertaker brought from Belmont. A few of the idle and curious watched from the hills, but none joined in the act itself, not even when, the coffin lowered, Amanda and Barnaby knelt together at the head of the grave and repeated the Lord's Prayer.

When the grave was filled and the sod replaced, the two went to the ruins of the house and barn, which lay

bare in all the hideousness of recent destruction, and Amanda stood for a time on the door-stone, now cracked and scaled by the heat, where she had lain when Ashgrave thrust her from the house on the day when she first offered to marry him. It was the same day, as it came strongly to her now, when she had met Barnaby and heard his love and acknowledged her own. She turned at that and looked at him. He started forward, thinking that at last she was to break the silence as to all things save the dead which she had maintained since the night of the fire, a silence that was and must be as a seal to his lips as long as she chose to hold it. Instead, she came back to the one absorbing idea that dominated.

"He must have cared less to live after he knew the house could not be saved," she said.

Barnaby was stung with disappointment and felt a little angered. He had shown patience that merited some acknowledgment at least.

"He scarcely knew death, it came so suddenly," he said. "He must have been unconscious from the instant the stone struck him."

"I wonder if I ought to be sorry he is dead?" she asked.

"But you are sorry," he said, wondering at the same time if, in his ignorance of women and their ways, what he had taken for sorrow was something else.

"I do not know," she said. "I pity him, as I would an animal struck down, especially an animal that found joy in life, for I think, bitter as the world was to him, living was a real joy. Is n't it cruel that it is taken away from him; the only joy he ever knew?"

"But," said Barnaby, putting forward a single word as a timid child tries the ice before venturing its weight;

"he would never have made you happy, and you had consented to go and live with him."

"Yes," she said, "I wonder if I am as sorry as I ought to be."

Still under the shadow of the tragedy which, as yet, had scarce left him time to think, Barnaby grasped at the words and, trying to find a unity of meaning in them, groped helpless, keenly alive to his inability to find the right thing to say, and too impressed with the meaning the moment might have, to risk saying the wrong word. So he turned with her and walked across the field and into the road that led to her father's farm, the road where he had met her on that day that both so well remembered.

When they came to the rocky ledge, where the kalmia bushes were only showing their first green, she paused as if with remembrance, and said:

"I have not tried to thank you yet for all you have done for me."

His heart sank, for he heard in the words dismissal.

"I have done nothing," he said, "of what I would gladly do and have the right to do."

A shade of pain passed over her face and made him feel that he had touched the wrong chord. Yet the spoken word was not to be recalled, and he let it stand without addition.

"For what you have done for him," she said, turning from the personal tone he had given her former words, "you deserve double thanks, for he was not kind to you."

"No," he answered, "but that is of the past. For anything he had done to me, I had no purpose to seek reprisal when I came back. I would be inhuman to remember it now. It was for your sake that I returned."

"And now," she said, "you must go — for my sake, too."

"Why may I not stay for your sake?" he asked, venturing again timidly.

"Because," she sighed, "I am tired. Tired of sin; tired of the cruelty of these people; tired of thinking!"

He made a movement to clasp her in his arms, a visible symbol of the support and comfort he would offer, but she started from him, with distress written in her face.

"No, no, no!" she exclaimed. "You must n't!"

"Who is there to forbid, unless you?" he demanded.

"There is a great gulf fixed between, so that I cannot pass to you, nor you to me."

"If so, it is you who have fixed it," he answered, thinking only of what he had said before, that it was hers alone now to say what their future relations should be.

She grew white and tense under her sense of the deeper meaning of the answer, in which there was something of that appeal to the esoteric that was the under-current of life to her.

"Yes," she said softly, "I have digged the pit and have fallen into it."

Then he saw the cruel thing he had said unwittingly, and knew the sting of impotent anger at himself. He could not even deny her interpretation without affirming it, and so was reduced to silence which was in itself reaffirmative.

She broke the embarrassment of silence, thus fallen between them, in the simplest way, by holding out her hand and saying:

"So, good-bye. I have so much to thank you for, that to try to thank you is to belittle it."

"Thank me by not thanking me," he said. "Let me feel that you take what I have been able to do as I give it, freely. But why 'good-bye'? I can't go until the inquest is over."

"Oh," she said, "so my affairs must still hold you here. But even then it is better that it be 'good-bye.'"

He was hurt that she should desire to dismiss, and missed the thought for him which moved her. With masculine obstinacy, he refused to yield.

"I will come and say 'good-bye' when they are ready to let me go," he said.

"Then, good-night." She turned and moved slowly homeward, as one who goes of compulsion and not of choice, knowing a stronger power than personal desire.

CHAPTER XLV

BARNABY PROMISES TO GO

AT THIS juncture of affairs at Padanaram, the county attorney found himself in a position curiously embarrassing to an official honestly anxious to win the reputation of doing his duty, yet faced with one of those crimes which from the beginning he knew to be unpunishable, because the people held it less a crime than was the inciting cause. He had no illusions for the tinkling brass and empty sounds of a criminal code not founded in the conscience of its public.

Back of the public, the stolidness no less than the conscience of which stood to baffle him, and distinct from it, was the governor of the state, a man of affairs, who represented the judgment of the greater community on the Ashgrave riot, and was indisposed to take account of the immobility of the smaller community, with which was the county attorney's official relationship.

Under these circumstances, there was the wisdom of the serpent manifested in the loud clamour of an investigation so searching as to fail of little, save the discovery of the offenders. From the moment when he played in rivalry with the coroner at the inquest, to that when the lapse of time enabled him safely to allow the inquiry to die, the county attorney hung as a menace on the quiet and good fame of Padanaram, and during the period of active interest retained the confidence of the authorities of the state.

He had no distinctly formed purpose to the condonement of crime, but simply precomprehension that no degree of proof necessary to individual conviction could be secured, since every possible witness could of right stand mute under the plea that his answer might tend to self-incrimination, and public judgment held that through these men had been removed a menace to the Protestant faith of the community which no process of law could reach.

Yet there was a moment that threatened endless complications to the county attorney's simple programme, when Bill Holden and Si Patterson developed a drunken impulse to turn state's evidence, under the double hope of personal immunity and possible pecuniary reward, which a curious misconception of the enduring qualities of money under reckless expending, had rendered desirable. The conscience of a public official may, however, prove not without recourse, even under such a menace as this. Under the law, one is not permitted confession, without solemn warning that whatever he may say can be used against him, and that it is his right to refrain from saying anything that will tend to disgrace or incriminate himself. Moreover, to promise immunity in return for testimony, is to place it in the category of purchase evidence, and, therefore, to discredit it. Consequently the witness must be prepared to state that no promise has been made, and, consequently, he must be prepared to take his chances.

Under these conditions, what more fair than that a conscientious prosecutor should decline to avail himself of testimony that might prove incriminating to the witness, unless the witness is fully warned in advance of his danger and his rights? Counsel was assigned the would-be revealers of the secrets of the Ashgrave night,

and they learned that whatever they said would be usable against themselves, while as to any immunity in the future, they must so far take it on trust as to be able to answer on the stand that no promises whatever had been made them in return for their speaking.

Thenceforth their mouths were fast shut. As Bill Holden in his lucid, non-conventional speech expressed it:

"We hain't such lunes as to trot out the goods till the brass is planted down on the counter — not if we know ourselves, an' we guess we do."

The prosecuting attorney reported his disappointment to the governor, a disappointment sustainable only under a rapt contemplation of the vindication of the constitutional right of every citizen to hold his tongue, when its loose wagging may prove personally injurious, a right so frequently honoured in the breach that one may not blame a man, oppressed not impossibly with a flux of verbosity on the part of others, who sees to its safeguarding, even at the expense of honour he might gain officially in the unravelling of a criminal mystery that remains dark and mute.

"This yere county 'turney sorter remin's a feller o' Miss Allen down Belmont way," Blanket confided to Barnaby one evening, while the investigation was dragging slowly on.

His old liking for Barnaby remained and, united with his older liking for gossip, led him to haunt the places which Barnaby affected. In his turn, the latter was not sorry for the help that the stage driver proved in disposing of hours that hung heavy on his hands. His detention as a witness released him from the necessity of considering whether, in deference to Amanda's wishes, he ought not to leave, while her refusal to see him robbed

his enforced residence near her of any advantage it might otherwise have had.

"Miss Allen," Blanket continued in explanation, "is jest the neates' housekeeper thar be in seven towns. Ef you dumped a mess o' dirt in her settin'-room, she'd sweep it round and round till thar war n't a bit o' dirt left. 'Fore this feller gits through, thar won't a' ben no riot nor no fire nor nobody dead. I only hope to massy he won't bring Joe Ashgrave back to arth!"

"I don't believe there's anybody who wants him, unless it's his wife," answered Barnaby, more bitter in mood than was his custom.

"She only thinks she wants him, 'cause she can't get him," Blanket assured him. "I somehow guess, ef the Widder Marlow sh'd say 'yes,' I'd wish I had n't axed her."

"She don't seem likely to get a chance," laughed Barnaby.

"Sartain's you're born she'll get a chance sometime," Blanket declared. "More'n a half-dozen times, I've hed to bite my tongue to keep it from poppin' out, an' some o' these days I'll forget and then the fat'll be in the fire."

"There ought to be a society for the protection of unprotected widowers," suggested Barnaby,

"A sorter Neal Dow law agin marryin' widders might be a good thing," he admitted.

"Yes, for those who need guardians."

"Wall, I'd like tu know what guv'ment's fur, ef 'taint 'cause ev'rybody kin tend to some other feller's consarns better 'n he kin to his own."

"T ain't your time yet to take up the widder business," Blanket said a little later, "'cause no matter how on'ry a feller may be, when he's dead, folks hes got to purtend

to be sorry an' he's got tohev time tu get over it. Thar's too many on us got a puusonal intrist in the custom ever to let it be given up."

"I don't think she's ever likely to marry again," said Barnaby.

"I don't nuther, unless the right man axes her," declared Blanket.

Childish as he knew it, Barnaby felt better for having Blanket say these things, and lost no opportunity to give the conversation a turn that might lead reasonably to their repetition. Yet behind it all he had an abiding sense of the woman's strength of will, and that in some way, incomprehensible to him, she was persuaded that she had no right to marry again. He could not follow this out logically; he could not name any one thing or any number of things that led him to the belief. He merely knew that he held it, and while he held it, no argument of his own and no judgment of others could persuade him. Yet he found comfort in assurances to the contrary even from Blanket.

As the stage driver had said, something was due to the memory of the dead man, whatever had been his shortcomings in life, and Barnaby, with his fuller knowledge of and dependence on convention, would have given this full play, save for that underlying conviction of his of the sincerity of whatever Amanda did. Thus when she kept herself close within her father's house, refusing to see visitors, and demanding that he should not even try to see her, he knew there was nothing of pretence in the act, which in another might have been the method of feeding the flames of his passion. She was, to his mind, genuinely and truly mourning the death of Ashgrave, and this was so far inexplicable that, for its very strangeness, he accepted it as final.

Released at last from his attendance as a witness, he found the solace of departure, which stared him in the face, in the fact that it gave him excuse for seeing her which even she, with regard to what had passed between them, could not deny. On that he must base his claim without flinching, sacrificing even the delicacy that forbids such use of service done, to the more urgent right of a parting interview. He pitted the wrong of denial against that of violated delicacy, and without even deceiving himself as to the partiality or impartiality of his judgment, refused to abate his claim.

"The farce might have been shorter in the playing," he said the day he came to take leave, "if they had only said in the first place that they were going to prove that while there was a riot there was nobody in it."

"The waiting must have been very dull," she said.

"Yes," he admitted, "because you would n't see me."

"It was better for us both," she answered sadly.

He caught at the substance of the words, without the possible comfort they implied.

"That's always the way!" he cried. "It's better, it's better, it's better! Deny yourself something you want, and maybe you'll get something else you don't care a snap for."

"I was not thinking that," she said. "I was not thinking of getting, only of your being spared pain."

"But I wanted to see you; I wanted to be with you; I wanted to comfort you. Could there be any greater pain than to be denied this?"

He struck the note of his personal loss, the note of assured selfishness, and inasmuch as it excluded her for the moment, she could feel with him the enormity of the denial he had undergone.

"I 'm so sorry," she said, and the sorrow was a hundred-fold more in the look than in the simplicity of words.

"Then make it good, and I 'll stay!"

A look of alarm came into her face, a fear born of distrust of herself and her wish for him, if he stayed. He read it as the spontaneous expression of her wish that he should go.

"I thought," he added, covering the crassness of his selfishness with a thin veneer of thought for her, "that it might be something to you just to have me here."

"Oh you don't know, you can't know, how much it would be if only I dared."

"What are you afraid of?" he asked in wonder.

"Of you, of myself, of us both."

Then he laughed, more joyously than for many a day.

"If that's the trouble," he answered, "then your fear is my courage."

Every show of hope on his part was, however, an alarm to her conscience, which stood guard not simply on the abstract questions of right and wrong, but rather as the mentor of her love to protect the rights of the loved one. That joy of sacrifice, which was to her the spirit of love that would have urged her to give all, had she wherewith to give, became fear when she saw him, whom she loved, ready to clasp it that he might take her, who had lost all, into his life.

"You must not have courage," she exclaimed, "except to tear yourself from me."

"Do you love me?" When all argument was denied, he came back to the simple demand.

"You must not ask," she said, weak to deny as to confess.

"Why? Because you would be spared the pain of denial?"

"No, a hundred times, no," she cried in the intensity of her fear that he would doubt her, then checking herself in a panic of fear at the meaning of her words.

She had, however, said all in saying this much, and he simply came back to the plainest of declarations:

"Then I stay!"

So the afternoon wore away, while he ranked the inertia of his refusal to heed her warnings as the ally of the love she was too weak and at the same time too strong to deny. At last, he broke down her guard, and for the strength of her commands she substituted the weakness of pleading, and so won momentarily.

"Please go," she said. "I could not listen now, even if I would. I was his wife, something is due to that."

"I will give all you ask to that," he said "only I must know that when I have given, I may hope."

"When you have gone," she said, "you may come again — if you want to, then."

"If I want to? Do you think my love is made of such stuff?"

"It were better for you if it was," she hesitated.

"Well, it is n't," he answered sharply. "I shall come again."

"But you will go now? And," interrupting him as he would have spoken, "when you are away, and before you come back, think, think of — everything." She covered her face with her hands, and now he knew that his silence on the greatest event of her life had been, not solace to memory, but its refreshment, and that she imputed it to fear on his part to face the fact and not as evidence that, so far as his love and acts were concerned, the fact did not exist.

CHAPTER XLVI

THE FINDING OF A SOUL

SIMEON CRAIG sat under the sloping roof of his bare chamber, verifying his accounts and apportioning his quarterly salary, just received, to the various purposes originally designated and since rigidly adhered to. The room was shabbier than of old, and his garments were worn and shiny, as it is the nature of black to become. None the less, there had been no wavering in the past and there was none now. He would gladly have pared a few dollars off the scanty portion of his income originally set aside for his own uses, but he had gauged them so accurately at the beginning to his barest necessities that this was impossible.

He was yet too young not to face the future. He was too honest with himself not to own that that future held for him nothing of which the past did not give the measure. His parish was of the narrowest, with no enlarging interests. Bound in the circle of their daily round, his parishioners addressed themselves to the saving of their souls as to the saving of their hay crop, because they belonged to themselves and the loss would be theirs. Yet it was the field in which his labour must lie. Broader parishes do not seek in such as these men to do their broader work, and even if they did, there was nothing in his experience here to fit him for larger effort. He must, perforce, grow narrow under the narrow influences that surrounded him, and the best he had to look to was the time when he should be content. Unable to make broad

his work, it must in the end narrow him to its own measure.

When he reached this point, he started with a consciousness of how far he had travelled from the simple enthusiasm with which he had taken up the work of the ministry. Then the assurance that, under his pastorate, a single soul would be turned from darkness to light, would have seemed to him abundant reward for the work of a lifetime spent amid sordid want and the denial of every aspiration, save that for God. Now — ? He rose and took from the table the Bible and turned its pages in half fearing wonder.

Restless and uneasy under a sense of self-condemnation, he seized his hat. Striking across the fields, he gained the heights that lay between the Seagrave and the Ashgrave farms. Summer had mantled with green the ruins of barn and homestead, and now autumn was making way again for the barrenness and desolation that winter would bring. He recognised the spot with a start at the direction his restless wish for breadth of air and sunlight had taken him. It was not, however, to quibble or hesitate at the underlying fact. Here was the cause of his changed relation to the work of his parish. He had come to it a priest, but in one woman's eyes had seen that which made him remember he was a man. The knowledge had never left him, though he had striven to bury it under text and sermon and the drudgery of his priestly duties, now grown dreary.

He had saved souls and presented them to God. He had preached sermons that found the joints in the proof armour of indifference, and stirred old professors of the Word, until they came again to the Mercy Seat, with the fervour of hope that was the riches of a soul in its earliest love. But his own hope, his own faith, his own love?

These had fallen dim, as a candle burned untended; and had he demanded of his own soul, "Oh Soul, how is it with thee?" he could not truthfully have answered, "I have taken firm hold on God, I have wrestled with Him and will not let Him go." Between heavenly love and earthly love, he had thought that he might pause and choose, not seeing that the very thought was choice of darkness and banishment of light!

Then as if God had brought him there to test him, or, as he read it, because God had brought him there to test him, at a turn in the path, he found himself face to face with Amanda Ashgrave.

The darkness of the days when she was neither a maid nor a wife had fallen from her, leaving a deepening of the girlish beauty that one felt rather than saw. The draught she had drunk from the cup of the world's real sorrow had given her that broader insight which alone was needed to teach her that what she had held before as sorrow was but that isolation of self, through which one loses touch with life.

Ashgrave was dead; she had had the courage to send away Barnaby under the scarce lesser sting of that recall to life of her old love. Out of the wreck of her life she had been able to bring something that gave her a closer touch with her kind and taught her sympathy, which is the spirit of charity.

In her widowhood, Padanaram forgot her wifehood, but it did not forget that the owner of a hundred acres of good farm land, albeit the buildings had burned, was a person of some consequence. As yet she was scarce to be openly sought, but to the knowing ones there were clear indications that more than one was playing for position, and that there would be sharp competition for the right to rebuild the Ashgrave farm buildings.

"Were you going to father's?" she asked the clergyman. She showed her pleasure in the meeting; for if he had lost something in his clerical aspect from a scene which she remembered, he had gained something as a man through service she had not forgot.

"Yes," he answered, "but I did not know I was."

They walked together silently, as becomes an afternoon all glorious with the first touch of autumn.

"What do you hear of Mr. Barnaby?" he asked, yet stung that in the first breath of their meeting this name should come to his lips.

"I can answer in a word — nothing."

"He is not back from Europe, then." The sequence was complete, and his statement of it carried implication, if not assertion.

"I think we shall hardly know," she said.

"I think you will hardly fail to know," he changed her formula.

"He will scarcely find any desire to return here."

"He will scarcely have any, save to return here." He had a capping turn for every one of her utterances.

Then the real spirit of the man, which hated shamming and indirection, spoke out:

"He will come back to Padanaram because you are here."

She shuddered.

More than once had it seemed to her that the courage it demanded to send him away had not been hers, but rather had been the fear that came now, like a thief in the night without warning, that he would take her at her word, that it was best that he should forget. When he went, she had thought to close the door of hope, only to find that it was the door of life on which she had laid hands.

From his interpretation of the look of pain that came across her face, Craig drew sudden courage and hope, guessing little of the fear that it expressed, and her unwilling willingness that Barnaby should disobey her.

Suddenly the whole structure of repression, into which he had built himself since his conversion, crumbled to ruins. He was a lad again in the plow-land, his heart afame with the joy of young manhood calling to its mate. That which made the hard creed, which measured every fact by its effect in the hereafter, seem inexplicable and cruel, took to itself meaning and beauty, under the concept of something in the present of value in itself. For the first time, God spoke to him through human relationship, and he saw the morning of a new truth, that, like all truth, was good. Even as this new light took shape, against the background of its wonder stood forth the accounting angel, saying:

"That which God hath made, you have been bold to call evil; that which God hath ordained, you have dared to name as common; therefore hath God made you a laughing-stock and a by-word, because you have despised His law and set yourself in judgment on His judgment."

He turned and, seizing her hands, folded them between his own. In her astonishment, she stood passive, and, before she could recover self-control, he began, pouring out his soul in words:

"I have sinned and done evil in the sight of God; I have loved and yet fought what the good God sent me, as if the father of evil could send light!"

Then finally, even the verbal cloaking of his priestly years was rent, and he poured forth the story of his love, as a man pleads to the woman he would take to his arms, knowing not for the moment whether he be priest or

layman, saint or sinner, knowing only that his manhood cries aloud in its need for her womanhood, with the instinct that asks no tongue save that of humanity and love.

"Oh my beloved, I have need of you and you of me! I thought I was driving you from my heart, and it was not you, but God, He had given me this love, and I would not have it; now let it be mine, whatever else I lose! I have not known myself," he said. "I have thought I could say, 'I am a minister of God' and I would cease to be a man. I thought I could say to my heart, 'Your only need is God,' and it would be so. It is not so, and it has been you who have shown me my folly; you who have taught me what life demands. I love, I love — and still I love!"

She had stood, stunned with the suddenness of this revelation, silent. He gave no heed to her efforts to check him, while a sudden strange joy prevented her speaking. She was scarce thinking of the man who was before her, save in a dim way of the pain that would be his when he let her speak. In the flood of a sudden selfishness, she was struggling with the thought that if he could forget, if in his position he could think of her as his wife, she need hesitate no longer to let Barnaby speak, if he would.

"If he would." That thought brought realisation and she cried out in her agony. Craig ceased speaking and looked at her in wonder and with a species of terror. Then she found voice:

"Oh don't, don't!" she cried. "It cannot be! You don't know. I never thought — I can't think! Only it is impossible, impossible!"

The very unwontedness of his act was the confederate of her alarm. A quick reaction swept through him, and

his own sudden conception of the anomaly of his position and words would have defeated him, even with one who had the right to listen.

He loosened the fierce grasp with which he held her hands, and yielded to the struggle she had made to draw them from him. A flash of anger, that took measure of his act as unwarrantable, gave a touch to her tones unlike their usual gentleness.

"How dare you, Mr. Craig?" she demanded. "What have I ever done that you should treat me so?"

"Every being may dare in the name of love," he answered. "What has barred me from the common right?"

She could almost have smiled at the love that stooped to argue, had she not somehow realised that even under the argument there was a genuineness of devotion that raised the man, in his intense self-abandonment of his ministry, almost to the martyr's rank. She spoke more gently when she answered:

"But I have not consciously done anything to encourage you; I could not."

He was caught in the net of his own predilection for analysis and judgment outside the realm of dogma. He weighed her statement before he replied:

"No, I cannot accuse you. I have exercised the right to love that God gave me, without asking permission of any man or woman."

"But," she pleaded, "you know my position and should have respected it."

"You were the woman I loved. I know no greater respect than to have declared it honestly and openly."

"But you know I could not marry you—or any man," she answered, the flush of an old shame stealing up her face.

"You could marry me or any man who, with honest love, won your honest love. The man who loved you and hesitated — he is the one who casts shame on you and on human love."

She grasped with a sense of wild joy the words that he spoke, reading into them a meaning that came nearer to her life and her hope than he could have dreamed. Her pity for him and his hopeless love, already chilled by the cold argument to which his disposition and training turned him, faded before the sense of escape which came to her.

"Would there be no wrong," she asked, "in my marrying a man who loved me and sought me as a wife?"

The sense that she was talking to a would-be lover had passed, and it was only as her pastor, the spiritual guide whose words she was to accept as fraught with the weight of the mandate to carry the word to the uttermost parts of the earth, that she thought of him and questioned.

"Marriage is ordained of God," he answered, lapsing into the office to which she appealed. "Sin is the violation of God's ordinance, and though your sins be as scarlet yet shall they be as white as snow if you repent and are forgiven. The man who has dared profess to love, as God would have man love, and yet forgetting his own sins, makes that sin which another has repented of an excuse or a stumbling block, is not a man, he is a miserable coward!"

"Oh, but he has n't," she cried, lost in the assurance coming to her from the minister of God, that it would not be sin for her to open her heart to the pleadings of her lover.

"He? Who?" demanded Craig, suddenly alive to some hidden purpose in the questioning, which he had not suspected.

She opened her eyes in surprise, forgetful, in the agony of her present joy that Craig had come to her as a lover and not as a clergyman.

"Who?" she repeated. "Why, Mr. Barnaby of course!"

CHAPTER XLVII

BLANKET'S QUESTION IS SOLVED

IT WAS Tom Blanket who saw the minister holding Amanda Ashgrave's hands that afternoon on sugar hill. The indications all pointed to one result, and that was the discomfiture of Barnaby. Still, since he had nothing else to do, and was utterly incapable of keeping a secret, it occurred to him that it would be a good thing to tell the Widow Marlow, because, in the nature of things, she was fairly on the way to losing a boarder, and it would be a friendly turn to be the first to break the news.

She heard with open eyes and mouth and trembling lips, for a silent tie of friendship had grown up between her and the minister, none the less real because never shaped in words. She drew up the corner of her apron and wiped away the mists that were dimming her glasses.

"I lived alone afore he come, an' I kin agin; but it's lonesome work, an' a body's not so young as once."

"You might do wuss 'n take another pardner," Blanket suggested delicately.

She shook her head.

"I hain't given to merryin'. With some women it's a habit; but I hain't that-a-way."

"T ain't good fur man to be alone, the Bible ses so," he suggested.

"But thar hain't nothin' erbout woman. I 've looked partick'ler careful."

"Yes, but men hug women."

She flared with anger.

"I 'm a decent widder, an' hev ben more'n thirty year, I 'd hev you know. If ye can't talk decent, ye might jest as well go 'bout your business, Tom Blanket!"

She had n't grasped the joke and somehow, as he studied it, it did n't seem quite so plain as he had thought. He was sure it sounded differently when he heard it from Barnaby and stored it away for future use. So he made his peace and kept as near the original theme as he could without danger of offence.

"I 'spose I must get used to it," she sighed, "it 'll be kinder strange, a'ter three years, not to hev a man round the house."

"Hain't ye never thought ser'usly o' merryin' one?" he asked.

"No, I hain't!" she snapped.

"Wall now," he said, with a sigh, "thet 's disappintin'. I thought mebbe you hed."

"Well, I hain't," she reiterated.

He looked the crushing of his hopes, and his inability to withdraw gracefully. She waited, as if she expected from him feminine comprehension of feminine duplicity. Finally, caught in the mesh of her keenness and his masculine stupidity, she amplified:

"But thet hain't sayin' I might n't, ef you sh'd ever ax me."

Still he did not rise eagerly to the joy of this sudden revelation. He had dodged so long, playing with the sweet possibility, that it was a sensible loss to be brought to the issue of consummation. It simply availed him for one more dodge:

"When shall it be?"

The Widow Marlow gave a gasp. There was to be no formal proposal after all, and she was to stand cheated

at the end! A wise woman, however, who made no final sacrifice of substance for the sake of a mere shadow, she bowed to the inevitable when she recognised it, and postponed revenge to the time of illimitable opportunity.

"To-morrer week," she said. "Now get out, fur thar 's a mess o' things tu do afore then."

He accepted the date and drove away, but as he was turning into the road, he caught the failure of his joke, and called back:

"I meant embrace — though thet 's a kind er hug;" but she was already back in the house and intent upon her baking.

Blanket dropped down into a rounded bunch, with his elbows on his knees, and let the old horse jog on. He was not thinking of his own gain so much as of Barnaby's loss. He had written him a letter to meet him on his return from Europe, where he had been travelling; but now, if Barnaby came, he would be too late.

"I swan some fellers hes luck," he said. "It kinder occurred to me to feel o' the widder, an' thar I be, fixed fur a week from to-morrer; an' thet chap courted like all tarnation, an' somebody else takes the gal off'n his hands! An' ten chances to one, he 'll be as mad 's tophet when he finds it out. Mebbe he 'll come up; 'cause I told him ef he did n't, she 'd be likely to go pretty quick soon 's the year 's up."

That night, for the first time since she sent him away, Amanda wrote to Barnaby. She had so much she could have said, that her letter was of the briefest.

Her note ran:

When you promised to wait a year, I gave my promise that if ever, before the year was over, my mind was at rest as to my

right to marry, I would write, giving you leave to come. You can come, if it is still your wish, at any time.

Two days later, Blanket's trip from the Junction was made memorable by the second telegram he had ever brought to Padanaram. He drove directly to the Seagrave farm and delivered it into Amanda's own hands, refusing to entrust it to any intermediary. It was from Barnaby and ran:

Have just landed. Will be with you to-morrow.

In some mysterious way, Blanket had satisfied himself that the message was from Barnaby and that he was coming. As soon as the mail was delivered, he hurried to the Widow Marlow's.

"I guess thar's some hitch in the pahson's marryin'," he announced.

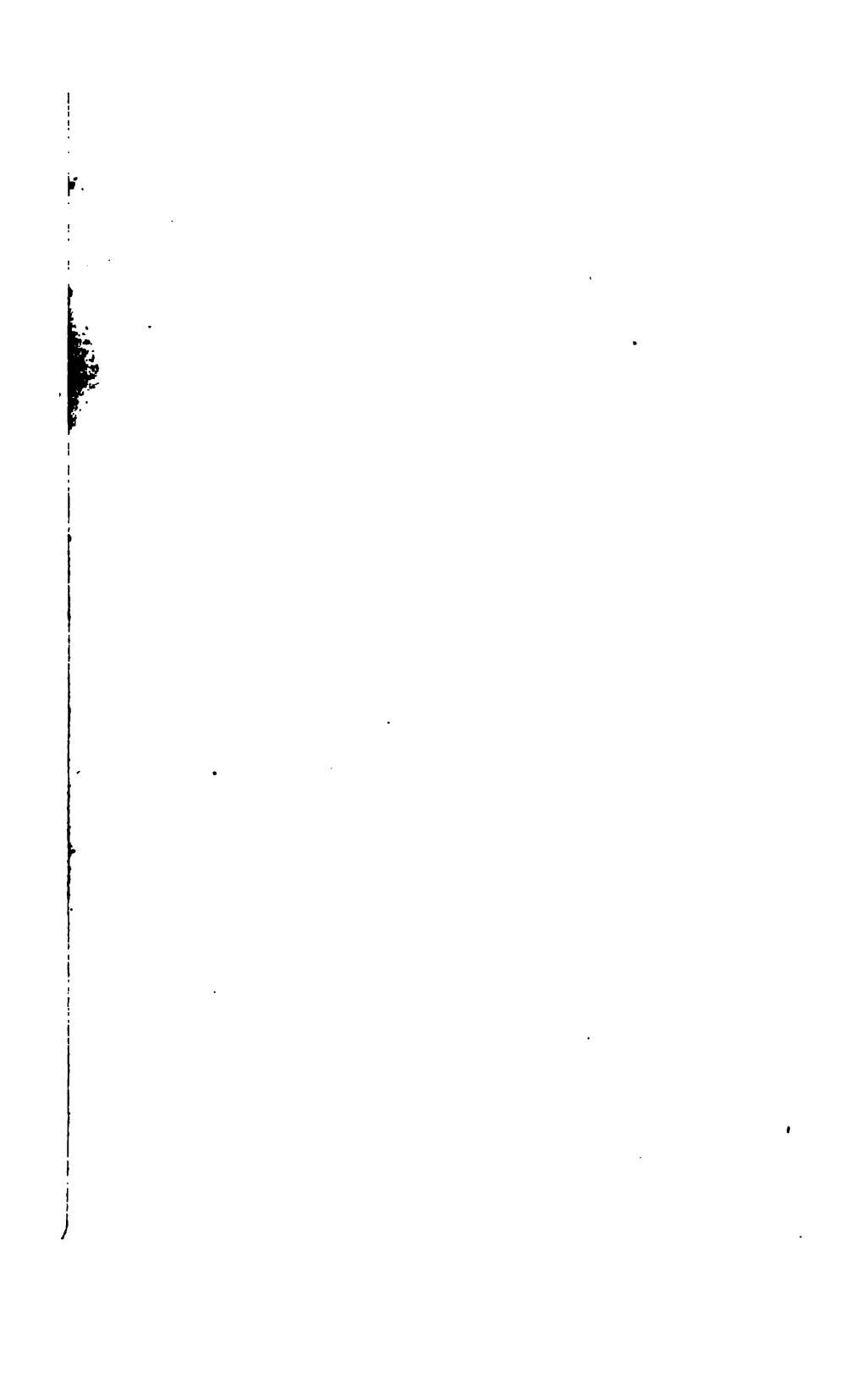
"Wall," the widow declared, "even if thar be, 't ain't much more trouble tu take keer o' two men than it be o' one, 'specially 's you 'll be away mostly daytimes."

"I did n't know," Blanket began, only to be sharply interrupted with:

"I 've got my plans laid an' my bakin' done, an' I hain't goin' to change 'em fur nobody!"







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